

DIDACTIC AND PURPOSE NOVELS IN
AMERICA: THE IMPLICATIONS AND
EFFECTS THEY HAVE HAD ON TRENDS
IN THE NOVEL, 1789-1941

D. G. Ross

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Thesis

DIDACTIC AND PURPOSE NOVELS IN AMERICA:
THE IMPLICATIONS AND EFFECTS THEY HAVE
HAD ON TRENDS IN THE NOVEL, 1789-1941

by

Donald Graham Ross

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INTRODUCTION

The terms "didactic" and "purpose" used in this thesis are sometimes synonymous, and sometimes possessed of separate meanings. They are employed to designate novels fitted or intended to teach, convey instruction, expose a current abuse, or espouse a cause. In all cases, the authors had an ulterior motive in writing their novels, a motive beyond the attempt to amuse or delight the reader, using the novel-form as a sugar-coating for their preachments.

Some of the early novels were frankly didactic, some were partly didactic, and partly purposeful, and others were straight purpose fiction. Novels that preach on a multitude of things, or are not primarily aimed at a specific evil are considered as "didactic". Novels that were written to champion a specific cause are considered as "purpose" novels. Some novels included in this study combine these two types. The changing literary tastes necessitate this ambiguity of terms, for neither term will cover every instance. All the novels used in this thesis were written as vehicles for some sort of message. In most cases, this message has been placed ahead of the artistic considerations.

There are many reasons why a partial examination of the effects of these influences is of interest: as an aid in understanding changes in American literary taste, to show the development and refinement of the techniques used in the production of these novels, the connections between this type of fiction and fiction in general. The changing nature of the purposes and ideals championed is a very accurate index of the rise of

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a national social conscience. The downfall of the domination of pure didacticism was an essential to the development of any worthwhile American fiction. It touches upon the novel for its own sake, for, by a paradox, the nearer one of these novels comes to straight fiction, the better it will drive home its purpose, and ^{the} closer it comes to straight preaching, the weaker it becomes. Seemingly, these novels should not be written for instruction or the propaganda ^{izing} of ideas not relating to the author's own experiences -- i.e., the advocacy of genteel manners, temperance, abolition, the struggles of labor, social strife, or hewing to the party line and the dialectic. The more artful the presentation of the purpose, the better the chances for success will be.

This does not pretend to be a complete study of the problem, nor is what has been done an impartial treatment. There will probably be much in the work that will cause questioning, due to the great influence of personal opinion involved in the primary selection, but this cannot be avoided. Many statements made casually are worthy of more extended treatment. Many subjects treated in this survey deserve greater amplification, but lack of space precludes this, for if they were given fuller treatment, the survey would become excessively bulky.

After making a rather detailed examination of the background of the American novel in an effort to show why the bias of the novel took the form that it did; ⁹ how it broke away from this attitude, the survey takes up temperance and slavery novels. From here on, only key-works are mentioned, and made to serve as type-examples. Each new development in technique is mentioned, in its correct chronological position: this has been judged more effective than inserting this material in a separate section.

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In the light of the findings of this survey, a set of rules is given for the construction of an effective purpose novel -- effective both for the purpose and effective by the canons of fiction. An attempt is made to predicate the chances such a novel has of becoming a success, and transforming that success into lasting fame after the cause advocated has been achieved, or becomes obsolete.

The lack of collected information on these matters has caused a weakening of many statements, due to lack of authoritative documentation, but all attempts have been made to find some sort of basis for the majority of these statements. It is to be hoped that someone will probe further into these matters and attempt to supply this deficiency.

purpose, when they become malignant, and reproduce at a faster rate than the other components of the literary body, are the subjects of this discussion. Like the poor, they are always with us, but the interest here is primarily in their over-abundance, when they poison and inhibit the other elements.

The Puritans have been popularly accused of fathering the over-stress of didacticism and purpose in American literature; they greatly extended the sway of these factors, but they merely were continuing an age-old tradition respected by both Puritan and anti-Puritan minds throughout Europe. What the Puritans did do was to extend still further the bias towards writing that preached and instructed to the mass of the people, thus instilling within them a suspicion of that kind of literature that they had formerly preferred. It is interesting to see that Sidney's *Apologie* gives a list of Puritanical objections to poetry which contains all the charges later to be leveled at the novel:

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PART I

The Background of the American Novel

Classical and European literature provided the elements for America's literary mutations. In these diverse strains were included some that have stayed dominant despite all efforts to make them recessive. Far from showing any evidences of becoming recessive, they have outlasted some of the more desirable strains. To continue in the clinical, we see that like diseases, these strains have modified considerably, according to a more or less definite pattern. These literary strains, the elements of didacticism and purpose, when they become malignant, and reproduce at a faster rate than the other components of the literary body, are the subjects of this discussion. Like the poor, they are always with us, but the interest here is primarily in their over-emphasis, when, they poison and inhibit the other elements.

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"Nowe then goe wee to the most important imputations laid to the poore Poets, for ought I can yet learne, they are these, first, that there being many other more fruitefulle knowledges, a man might better spend his time in them, then in this. Secondly, that it is the mother of lies. Thirdly, that it is the Nurse of abuse, infecting us with many pestilent desires: with a Syrens sweetness, drawing the mind to the Serpents tayle of sinfull fancy." ¹

From the Middle Ages had come the division of literature into the theological and the secular, with a wide gap in between. The secular literature was divided into the homily and the tale. The masses preferred the tale, but their betters wanted them to prefer the homily, and did all within their power to enforce their will. In Puritan New England there was a relatively large percentage of peasantry, now able to read and write. Their betters were men that were strongly opposed to the tale, over-stressing the homily and unsugared theological writings. The Puritan Javeh was a jealous God, so the theocracy tried to stamp out all secular writings that did not tend to lead the reader to Him. This stiff opposition to any writing that was intended to amuse was finally broken, along with the authority of the Puritans, but the American lower middle-class still retains traces of that bias towards didacticism and purpose in its reading which has encrusted its natural love of the tale.

The baleful influence of over-stressing didacticism and purpose, along with other hindrances, held back the novel in America, and caused it to be regarded with a suspicion that is not gone today. There are still Americans who look on novel-reading as depravity. The Boston News Letter, back in the seventeenth century, before any American novels had been

¹

The Great Critics (N.Y., 1939) p. 215

written, fulminated that novels were "full freighted with Nonsense, Unmannerliness, Railery, Prophaneness, Immorality, Arrogance, Calumnies, Lyes, Contradictions, and what not, all tending to Quarrels and Divisions, and to Debauch and Corrupt the Minds and Manners of New England."²

In 1875, one of the most popular preachers in New York seriously announced to his congregation that:

"The man who gives himself up to the indiscriminate reading of novels will be nerveless, inane, and a nuisance. He will be fit neither for the store, nor the shop, nor the field. A woman who gives herself up to the indiscriminate reading of novels will be unfit for the duties of wife, mother, sister, daughter."³

As late as 1890, The Ladies' Home Journal could give the following information to its reader in all seriousness:

"What is a Good Book?"

"A good book is one that interests you.

One in which the bright rather than the dark side of life is shown.

One that makes you see how mean are the small sins of life and how despicable are the great sins.

One that glorifies virtue in women and honor in men.

One in which the good are rewarded and the wicked are made to suffer.

One that convinces you that the world is filled with good men and women."

Etc., etc., etc.⁴

The Bok editorial from which this is taken is full of praise for the purely didactic; indeed, an examination of the Journal will show a constant emphasis on pure and edifying literature of the most innocuous sort.

To fully realize the deep impression the Puritan bias made upon the rural mind, it was not until 1905 that Sears and Roebuck listed fiction

² The Liberation of American Literature, p. 71, citing The Boston News Letter

³ Sports that Kill, p. 181

⁴ The Ladies' Home Journal, May, 1890, pp. 8. The Rev. De Witt Talmage, author of Sports that Kill had a regular column, and preached much on appropriate literature for his women readers. He and Bok saw eye to eye on this question and often joined in their efforts at literary regeneration.

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as the best seller in its Catalogue book lists; that is, the best seller after the Bible, and in that day, the majority of rural America got its reading matter from Sears'. Today, while a lack of didacticism will not condemn a book, there is a small but vocal school of criticism that will damn it if it does not have social significance, which has become the didacticism of the twentieth century. The success of Uncle Tom's Cabin in the fifties, Ramona in the eighties, and The Grapes of Wrath in our own time shows that the novel with a purpose can make its influence felt. An investigation into these two elements is of value, if for no other purpose, to help understand the development of the American reader and the novels written for his consumption. Thanks to the cultural lag, the didactic and purpose novels have been able to color thought to a greater extent than their intrinsic worth would seem to indicate. That is, due to the length of time that it takes for the author to become aware of a problem, and for the populace to accept his book, considerable can happen. And the number of authors of this type of novel that foresee independently the evils they preach against is few. The majority merely chime in after the popular trend has been clearly indicated as financially attractive for further protest. In nearly all cases, these novels merely aggravate the situation, instead of improving it. With the single exception of Bellamy, none of these writers pointed out potential evils in the moral or social order; they stormed against already-known evils, or maladjustments.

The sources from which didacticism and purpose spring, go back into history. Literary traditions all held to a strong emphasis on these two factors; indeed, they came first in any evaluation of literary worth. America was looked upon as a new world where, in comparatively unspotted

as the best seller in its Catalogue book lists; that is, the best seller after the Bible, and in that day, the majority of rural Americans got its reading matter from Sears. Today, while a lack of education will not condemn a book, there is a small but vocal school of criticism that will damn it if it does not have social significance, which has become the fashion of the twentieth century. The success of Uncle Tom's Cabin is the fashion, Hammans in the night, and The Grapes of Wrath in our own time shows that the novel with a purpose can make its influence felt. An investigation into these two elements is of value, if for no other purpose, to help understand the development of the American reader and the novels written for his consumption. Thanks to the national lag, the didactic and purpose novels have been able to color thought to a greater extent than their intrinsic worth would seem to indicate. That is, due to the length of time that it takes for the author to become aware of a problem, and for the populace to accept his book, considerable can happen. And the number of authors of this type of novel that foresee independently the evils they preach against is few. The majority merely chase in after the popular trend that has been clearly indicated as financially attractive for further profit. In nearly all cases, these novels merely aggravate the situation, instead of improving it. With the single exception of Bellamy, none of these writers pointed out potential evils in the moral or social order; they stormed against already-known evils or maladjustments.

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innocence, a new social order might be established. When the Europeans came here, they brought their literary prejudices with them. They were able for some time to insure that any writings that did not conform to their standards ~~were~~ suppressed, since the number of printing presses was limited, and easily controlled.

In England, the Glorious Revolution of 1688 insured the return of the aristocratic way of thought, but the Puritan domination continued unchallenged in her American colonies until the early nineteenth century. This meant that the protests against literature not subservient to didacticism did not get very far in England, and this obstacle did not have any serious effect on the development of the novel and its public acceptance; consequently the English authors were able to achieve a high standard in their work. In America, on the otherhand, the events of 1688 had but a political effect, and served to lengthen the sway of Puritanism for another century. With all the agencies for reaching the public under rigid Puritan control, that portion of the American reading public that would have been receptive to the novel for its own sake was "protected" from the evil influences of novel-reading by the regenerate majority. Hence, the early novels, while they dealt with lurid themes, were mainly sermons in fictional form addressed to virgins, drunkards, and wife-beaters. The novelists were apologetic and defended their work with the triple plea that it was true to life, with its tendencies leading heavenward, and the scenes devoutly American.

New England is the best section of colonial America for study on the struggles of pure creative art to prove its right to existence. Here the repressive forces were the strongest, and here the first American novels appeared. In a study of the New England attitudes can be found a key to

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the whole problem. Puritanism was not merely a religious creed of the vast majority of New Englanders; it was also a program for society, and it was to take a century and a half to make a clear distinction between civil and ecclesiastical law here. When the theocracy was broken as a temporal power, it lived on through its intellectual sway, and this sway was not seriously challenged until the Revolution. It took the impact of the war with Britain to change Boston from the Christian Sparta to the Athens of America. As in the Sparta of old, esthetic activities not conducive to the advancement of the State were vigorously combatted and repressed. The reasons for this suppression can be explained by the premises on which Puritanism was built; those of total depravity and election. Since man's will is subject to his "natural" desires, and these desires impel him irresistibly towards evil, everything that would tend to aid him in this descent was outlawed. Calvinism busied itself to discover evidences of election, which led to an emphasis on introspection and mysticism. The drama and the novel were not aids to either introspection or mysticism, hence, they would have none of them.

The fact that plays and novels portrayed the corruptions and vices of Europe was in itself alone sufficient to damn them both in colonial America. The people had gone to a great deal of trouble to escape what they considered the evils of Europe, and they didn't want them made attractive to Americans. Plato wanted to outlaw the poets from his Republic, the New Englanders wanted to outlaw novelists, for the same reasons -- they both told lies, since they told of things which did not actually happen, and would be enervating to the virtue of the citizens. No sort of depravity was too bad to blame on the evil effects of novel-reading. Novels were the Devil's primers.

The reasoning behind this condemnation went something like this:

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the New Englander should spend the time when he wasn't earning a living or going to Church in serious consideration of his lot. If he read novels, which depicted that which was not, depicting a life far removed from New England, and, in all probability, showing the lecherous habits of Europe, his head would be filled with idle notions, and a dissatisfaction for his lot in life, leading him away from virtue and God, unfitting him for life in a workaday world. Novels were bad fare for men, but they were rank poison to women and children. The younger Timothy Dwight sets up the case of the Puritans against the novel quite forcefully:

"Between the Bible and novels there is a gulf which few novel readers are willing to pass. The consciousness of virtue, the dignified pleasure of having performed one's duty, the serene remembrance of a useful life, the hope of an interest in the Redeemer, and the promise of a glorious inheritance in favor of God are never found in novels."⁽⁵⁾

As the sway of the Puritans declined, the ability of the populace ~~all~~ to read increased, so that by the time the native authors appeared, there was a reading public greedy for writing a bit lighter than The Day of Doom, the sober ~~sermons~~ and Practical Pieties of their fathers.

The situation at the period of transition is summed up in the introduction to Royall Tyler's The Algerine Captive; or The Life and Adventures of Dr. Updike Underhill (1797):

"When he left New England, books of biography, travels, novels and modern romances, were confined to our seaports; or, if known in the country, were read only in the families of clergymen, physicians, and lawyers: while certain funeral discourses, the last words and dying speeches of Bryan Shaheen, and Levi Ames, and some dreary somebody's Day of Doom, formed the most diverting part of the farmer's library. On his return from captivity, he found a surprising alteration in the public taste. In our inland

5 Travels in New England and New York (London) Vol. II, p. 477

towns of consequence, social libraries had been instituted, composed of books designed to amuse rather than to instruct, and country book-sellers, fostering the new-born taste of the people, had filled the whole land with modern travels, and novels almost as incredible."⁽⁶⁾ But for all this, Tyler voices the customary plaint against the evils of

novels other than his own, and further on in the same preface, he states:

"The second misfortune is that Novels, being the picture of the times, the New England reader is insensibly taught to admire the levity and often the vices of the parent country. While the fancy is enchanted, the heart is corrupted."

"If the English novel does not inculcate vice, it at least impresses on the young mind an erroneous idea of the world in which she is to live. It paints the manners, customs, and habits of a strange country, excites a fondness for false splendor, and renders the homespun habits of her own country disgusting."⁽⁷⁾

The author, Tyler, was not one of the reactionaries, for he was a pioneer in both the novel and drama, and thus represents the attitude of the more liberal school of thought. Yet the grip of the didactic was so strong that he had to preface his novel with this plea for mercy.

It has been the custom to paint New England as a center of black reaction, a land whose tastes were far behind those of England and the Continent. It is true that she was not an originator of literary trends, but she was not too alien in spirit to England, where there was a strong vein of didacticism in the eighteenth century that ran alongside the Neo-classic spirit. The Neo-classic critics seemed to think that women and children were the sole readers of novels -- i.e., the ignorant and the immature, and hence they demanded a moral lesson and utter accuracy throughout. Fiction should be studiously and healthily didactic, for the benefit of these weak-brained readers. Dr. Johnson can act as spokesman for this whole school:

⁶ The Algerine Captive (Walpole) (1797) Preface, VI

⁷ The Algerine Captive (Walpole) (1797) Preface, VI

towns of consequence, social libraries had been instituted, commoned
of books designed to amuse rather than to instruct, and country book-
sellers, fostering the new-born taste of the people, had filled the
whole land with modern travels, and novels almost as incredible. (6)
But for all this, Tyler voices the customary plaint against the evils of

novels other than his own, and further on in the same preface, he states:
"The second objection is that novels, being the picture of the
times, the New England reader is necessarily taught to admire the luxury
and allow the vices of the parent country. While the fancy is enchanted,
the heart is corrupted."
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The Alchemist (W. 1414) (1737) Preface, VI
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for this whole school:

"These books are written chiefly to the young, the ignorant, and the idle. Hence they serve as lectures of conduct and introductions into life. They are the entertainment of minds unfurnished with ideas, and therefore easily susceptible of impressions; not fixed by principles and therefore easily following the current of fancy; not informed by experience, and consequently open to every false suggestion and partial account."⁸

Due to the conditions previously mentioned, these ideas and outlooks were strengthened in America, and the native literary mentors raged in much severer tones than those of the Doctor. Every effort was made by them to safeguard the "young, the ignorant, and the idle." Thanks to the strength of these notions, when the novel did appear, it had to come forth as moral instruction, a relation of Gospel truth. It is only fair to state, however, that in many cases these objections were not unjustified. The majority of the early American novels have earned their places well up on any list of the world's worst fiction. In most instances, they were written by rank amateurs, with no skill whatsoever, and no evidences of a sense of humor. Those who protested against the people reading too many of these botches were not necessarily doing so out of prejudices or hardened convictions. The chances are that we would berate them even more, were we to review them today. Noah Webster exemplifies the views of these critics in his essay on Female Education, written in 1790:

"With respect to novels, so much admired by the young, and so generally condemned by the old, what shall I say? Perhaps it may be said with truth, that some of them are useful, many of them pernicious, and most of them trifling. A hundred volumes of modern novels may be read, without acquiring a new idea. Some of them contain entertaining stories, and where the descriptions are drawn from nature, and from characters and events in themselves innocent, the perusal of them may be harmless. ---- At best, novels may be considered as the toys of youth; the rattle-boxes of sixteen.

⁸ The Rambler, No. 4, 31 March, 1750, B., p.20

for this whole school:

"These books are written chiefly to the young, the ignorant and the idle. Hence they serve as lectures of conduct and instructions in life. They are the entertainment of minds unimpaired with ideas and therefore easily susceptible of impressions; not fixed by principles and therefore easily following the current of fancy; not influenced by experience, and consequently open to every false suggestion and partial account."

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The mechanic gets his pence for his toys and the novel writer for his books, and it would be happy for society if the latter were in all cases as innocent as the former." ⁹

Nine-tenths of what he said holds good today; certainly the present-day percentage of good books in every hundred read would show but little improvement, if any.

Dwight gave the religious argument, Webster the critical, and now let Cotton Mather, the man who signifies the essence of Puritan theocracy to modern minds, give the Puritan economic argument against the novel:

" Moreover there are some who altho they are not altogether idle, nevertheless they spend their time unprofitably. It may be in Reading unprofitable books. Some read Prophane Books. Such as come from the Stage, whose vile design it is to corrupt good manners. Others spend their time in reading vain romances. It may be that if they had spent half that time in reading the Scripture and Books that shewed unto them the way to Eternal Life, they might have been converted thereby. But what are they the better for Reading Romantic stories? It is a mere loss of time." ¹⁰

Excerpts from the prefaces of many of the earlier American novels show an unvarying insistence upon the moral teachings of their authors. In most cases, they were written to insure acceptance of the book, but their very inclusion shows the strength of the popular prejudices.

It was not until 1789 that The Power of Sympathy, the first American novel, appeared. The Americans read the leading European authors, but as will be shown later, they didn't read them in sufficient numbers to counteract the provincial didacticism. Indeed, the native authors had a peculiar genius for imitating all the bad qualities of their European models and missing or mangling their strong points.

⁹ A Library of American Literature, N.Y. (1889) Stedman & Hutchinson
Vol. IV, pp. 149

¹⁰ cited by Calverton, (op. cit.) p. 76

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¹⁰ A Library of American Literature, N.Y. (1909) Steadman & Hutchinson

Vol. IV, pp. 142

10 cited by Calverton, (op. cit.) p. 72

Richardson had a profoundly bad influence on the American novel. Pamela was the first English novel to be printed in America, published by the leading American advocate of the doctrines of lower middle-class morality -- Benjamin Franklin. Richardson's blend of didacticism and emotionalism fathered great numbers of sentimental pabulum in a similar vein. Richardson had a wide following, and his didacticism made him acceptable to many who would not approve, let us say, of Fielding. The epistolary form was another element that was pounced upon by the American Richardsonian imitators. This method made it easier for persons with little or no talent to pass off their efforts on a literature-hungry populace. His lack of a sense of humor did much to make him popular. Pamela, Clarissa, Sir Charles Grandison made the seduced maiden, the mercenary parents, the captivating libertine, and the reformed rake stock characters in the American fiction of the next twenty years. From Richardson came the idealistic portraiture of character, and a marked stress on prudential morality. His patterns for rewards and punishments were subjected to all the changes. While he played the didactic strain for all it was worth, he set the patterns for the novel of seduction, a theme that flourished until the rise of the temperance and anti-slavery novels. While the American imitators of Richardson stressed the plebian morality, they reveled in depicting those scenes that would arouse the ire of persons opposed to novels depicting vice, especially European vice. There is a tradition that the "scurrilous book" that Jonathan Edwards sharply rebuked his younger parishioners for havingⁱⁿ their possession was none other than Pamela. So many imitations of the Richardsonian type were written, and became so popular that Carl Van Doren was able to state that:

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is merely being repeated in different colors and proportions." ¹¹

Laurence Sterne was a man greatly sinned against by his American imitators. All of those traits that made him great were above them; all that they gleaned from his works was a deluge of ultra-sensibility. Lacking Sterne's humor and change of pace, these would-be imitators were bathetic. Mrs. Sarah Rowson's The Inquisitor (1794) shows what this parodying of Sterne could be like. The combination of a poor imitation of Richardson and Sterne caused Hannah Webster Foster to declare, through the mouth of one of her characters that:

"We, in this country, are too much in a state of nature to write good novels yet. An American novel is such a moral, sentimental thing, that it is enough to give one the vapours to read one." ¹²

The one wanting element needed to certify the mediocrity of the early American novel was supplied by Goethe, especially his book The Sorrows of Werther. Wertherism became quite popular and was a species of extreme sentimentalism, which manifested itself in introspection and fruitless self-pity. A goodly number of novels speak out against Wertherism quite pointedly -- The Hapless Orphan (1793), The Power of Sympathy (1789), The Fruits of Werther (n.d.), The Original Letters of Ferdinand and Elizabeth (1798), and The Trial of Virtue.

The ideas of William Godwin, as set forth in Caleb Williams, brought an interest in social problems, and speculations about the victims of society, and a hero of increased intellect. Brockden Brown confessed that Godwin was his chief literary influence in his early novels.

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The American Novel, (N.Y., 1921) p. 7

¹²

The Boarding School (Boston, 1798) pp. 156-157

The Power of Sympathy, William Hill Brown, Facsimile Text Society (N.Y. 1933) Vol. II, p. 249

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11 The American Novel, (N.Y., 1931) p. 7

12 The Forging School (Boston, 1798) pp. 156-157

With the hodge-podge of materials and influences acquired from the European writers, an audience composed of women and girls, with a sprinkling of "refined" men, a lack of even the rudiments of a sense of humor or a sense of the ridiculous by any of the authors, and an absence of genuine talent (with the exception of Brockden Brown), it should not be a source of wonder that a great many people objected to these pot-boilers. The authors themselves often attacked all other novels but their own, with a critical ability that strangely vanished when they considered their own writings.

The First American novel, The Power of Sympathy; or, The Triumph of Nature, Founded on Truth (1789) was heavily larded with didacticism, and was written with a distinct purpose -- "to expose the dangerous consequences of seduction", and is indicative of the influence of Richardson. At every turn the author made the moral purpose stand out like a preacher's text. The book was published in Boston, and, curiously enough, it was suppressed almost as soon as it came out, for moral reasons, which would seem to indicate that Boston's proclivity for censorship is nothing new. The good people of Boston suspected that the book was a fictional account of the amours of Perez Morton, the husband of the woman who was once thought to have written the book, Mrs. Sarah Wentworth Morton. It is a history of scandal, sugar-coated with moral reflections. Harrington, the hero, falls in love with Harriot, who proves to be his half-sister, by an earlier amour of his father. Harriot dies of grief, and Harrington appropriately commits suicide, and is found with a copy of The Sorrows of Werther lying close by his body.¹³

The best authorities now maintain that the book was the work of a young

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The Power of Sympathy, William Hill Brown, Facsimile Text Society (N.Y. 1938) Vol. II, p. 149

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friend of Mrs. Morton, William Hill Brown. The dedication of The Power of Sympathy is a classic example of the inter-mingling of the elements of didacticism and purpose:

"To the young ladies of United Columbia, these volumes, intended to represent specious Causes, and to expose the fatal Consequences of
SEDUCTION

To inspire the Female Mind with a principle of Self-Contemplacency, and to Promote the Economy of Human Life, Are Inscribed, With Esteem and Sincerity, by their Friend and Humble Servant, The Author, Boston, Jahuary, 1789." (14)

This dedication gives several clues as to the audiences that read these early novels, which were nine-tenths sub-literary, sentimental, with skillfully glossed-over and camouflaged sex-motifs, mawkishly melodramatic, and embellished with florid rhetoric. The "Tale Founded on Truth" ruse was the device that allowed the novel with the moralistic motif to pass even the religious censorship.

Brown's preface to his book gives more information on the biases of the day:

"Novels have ever met with a ready reception into the Libraries of the Ladies, but this species of writing hath not been received with universal approbation. Futility is not the only charge brought against it. An attempt, therefore, to make these studies more advantageous, has at least a claim on the patience and candor of the Publick.

In novels which expose no particular Vice, and which recommend no particular Virtue, the Fair Reader, though she may find amusement, must finish them without being impressed with any particular idea; so that if they are harmless, they are not beneficial.

Of the letters before us, it is necessary to remark that this error on each side has been avoided -- the dangerous consequences of Seduction are exposed and the advantages of Female Education set forth and recommended." (15)

Brown continues lauding his book at every opportunity, claiming the volume to be instructive, and " I do not recommend it to you as a Novel, but as a work that speaks the language of the heart and thus inculcates the duty we

14 Ibid, i, Preface

15 Ibid, iii, Preface

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Of the latter before us, it is necessary to remark that this error on each side has been avoided -- the dangerous consequences of damnation are exposed and the advantages of female education set forth and recommended." (15)

Brown continues, treating his book as every opportunity, closing the volume

to be instructive, and "I do not recommend it to you as a novel, but as a

work that awakens the language of the heart and thus instructs the duty we

14 Ibid, I, Preface

15 Ibid, 111, Preface

owe to ourselves, to society, and to the Deity." (16)

Although the fictional elements of the book practically vanish for whole chapters at a time, the author lets us know that his book is a novel, and designedly so:

"Didactick essays are not always capable of engaging the attention of young ladies. We fly from the labored precepts of the essayist, to the more sprightly narrative of the novelist. Habituate your mind to remark the difference between truth and fiction. You will then always be enabled to judge of the propriety and justness of a thought; and never be misled to form wrong opinions, by the meretricious dress of a pleasing tale. You will then be capable of deducing the most profitable lessons of instruction, and the design of your reading will be fully accomplished." (17)

The Power of Sympathy can be called a novel only because of the lack of a more definitive classification. It is a series of letters and lectures that are held together by the plot mentioned above. Judged by present-day standards, it is very bad. The moral smoke-screen is all too effective, and all but **totally** hides the real plot. Yet Brown has one of his characters make mention of a problem that would make a great impression on the

purpose novels to come -- African slavery. Harrington, the hero, writes,

"I felt my heart glow with feelings of exquisite sympathy as I anticipated the happy time when the sighs of the slave shall no longer expire in the air of freedom." (18)

The artful pandering to all the reader-prejudices that Brown did insured that the book could pass muster as a piece of moral instruction, and thus it satisfied both sides -- the reformers because they could see profit from the "lessons" of the book, and the general reader, who could wade through the sermonizing to get to his story. The book was a great success.

In 1790 appeared The Memoirs of the Blooms Grove Family, written by the Rev. Enos Hitchcock, D.D., a novel-thread upon which the author hangs epistolary lectures upon education and morality to give his sentiments on

16 Ibid, Vol. II, P. 4

17 Ibid, Vol. II, P. 4

18 Ibid, Vol. II, p. 32

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18 1810, Vol. II, p. 4
17 1810, Vol. II, p. 4
16 1810, Vol. II, p. 30

a mode of domestic education, suited to the present state of morality, government, and manners in this country. It has all of the flaws of the Brown book, without its slim plot, for it is nothing more than straight sermonizing. While the good Doctor employs the novel-form to convey his favorite ideas, he has not a too-lofty opinion of the novel in general:

"Another thing which has a tendency to lessen the excellence of the female character and render the minds of young ladies empty and vain is the books they read and the manner in which they spend their time. Nothing can have a worse effect on the mind of our sex [this is a letter from one woman to another] than the free use of those writings which are the offspring of modern novelists. Their only tendency is to excite romantic notions, while they keep the mind void of ideas and the heart destitute of sentiment. They create a false taste, without balancing the account by the weight of information and judgment. I do not mean, my dear girls, to intimate that all books bearing the denomination of novels or plays, are of the above description: there are many works of imagination and of entertainment which are the most agreeable vehicles of pure and excellent instruction. But the common head of both those kinds of writing serve to corrupt the heart, while they prevent improvements in useful knowledge." ¹⁹

Further along, he comes out with this:

" Books written with a view to convey instruction through the channel of the imagination, are not only harmless and agreeable, but useful and improving to the young mind. To these I would then turn your attention, as being proper to accomplish the more solid parts of learning." ²⁰

Dr. Hitchcock protests against the slavery situation, "Many, who can defend their own rights with one hand are extending the other for the purpose of enslaving a part of their own species." ²¹ Goethe come in for a share of disfavor when the Doctor rails about " young ladies, who weep away a whole afternoon, over the criminal sorrows of a fictitious Charlotte or Werter(sic)." ²² The "Charlotte" refers to Charlotte Temple, heroine of the novel of the same title, which is a combination of the Richardsonian seduction theme, and the Goethean suicide-motif, and was the earliest fictional best seller.

¹⁹ The Memoirs of the Bloomsgrave Family, (Boston, 1790) Vol. II, pp. 82

²⁰ Ibid, p. 85

²¹ Ibid, p. 232

²² Ibid, p. 296

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disfavor when the Doctor rails about "young ladies, who weep away a
whole afternoon, over the criminal errors of a fictitious Charlotte or
Walter (sic)." 15 The "Charlotte" refers to Charlotte Temple, heroine of the

novel of the same title, which is a compilation of the Richardsonian
seduction theme, and the Goethean suicide-motif, and was the earliest

fictional best seller.

12 The Wives of the Boscawen Family, (Boston, 1790) Vol. II, pp. 82

13 Ibid., p. 82
14 Ibid., p. 112
15 Ibid., p. 108

Sometimes these novels preached against several evils -- Caroline M. Warren's The Gamesters; or, The Ruins of Innocence (1805) didactically pounds away against gaming, dueling, and seduction. The preface gives the author a chance to damn other novelists and thump her own tub:

"The light, unthinking mind that would revolt at a moral lesson from the pulpit, will seize, with avidity, the instruction offered under the similitude of a story. ... To blend instruction with amusement, and at once to regulate the imagination and to reform the heart, has been the author's sole object."²³

Possibly suspecting that her book left something to be desired, thanks to her self-imposed regulation, she stated:

"Though the author is confident the work would not pass unscorched through the fiery ordeal of criticism; yet if it gain one soul to virtue, or lure one profligate from the arms of dissipation, or snatch from the precipice of ruin, one fair fabric of innocence, she will deem herself amply compensated."²⁴

But Mrs. Warren held out some hope for the novel: " -- yet the author believes that were novels devoted to the cause of moral virtue, they might become as useful as they are thought to be pernicious."²⁵ It is typical of all of the authors of the period that they were far more interested in the approval of the moralist than that of the literary critic.

In 1804, before the native novel ~~1804~~ -writers had been able to show what they could really do, it was seriously proposed that,

"The best, and indeed the only remedy for this growing evil, is the introduction of publications, of the novel class, which are unexceptionable in their moral tendency, and calculated to impress on the young and tender mind sentiments of honor, of virtue, and of religion; to represent things as they are, not as the wild imagination paints them."²⁶

The college student of those days, far from being encouraged to read contemporary fiction, were warned against it, much as did Samuel P. Jarvis in his 1806 Yale Phi Beta Kappa address:

²³ The Gamesters, (Boston, 1805) preface, p. ii

²⁴ Ibid, p. v.

²⁵ Ibid, p. v.

²⁶ The Boston Magazine, II, p. 136 (June 16, 1804)

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32 The Gleaners, (Boston, 1802) preface, p. 11

24 Ibid, p. v.

25 Ibid, p. v.

26 The Boston Magazine, II, p. 136 (June 16, 1804)

"The taste for novels and all other kinds of light reading have arisen to an astounding and alarming height. Like the lean kine of Pharaoh, they have swallowed up all other reading, and like them too, they have not looked the better for it. The evil consequences attendant upon novel-reading are ~~the~~ much greater than has generally been imagined."²⁷

With a public that would not tolerate good unadulterated fiction, a public that would not buy books that were not tried and tested by time, or likely to be helpful in the day's work, there was little incentive for a man to write good fiction, since he would have no market for it. The incentive to originality was practically eliminated. Since the Puritans considered art as a demoralizing luxury born of aristocratic vice and extravagance, the lower middle-class in America, the group that was needed to give the support needed for strong American fiction, was almost totally lacking in a taste for un-didactic fiction. Even today, when the opposition to all art that does not serve a religious or didactic end has disappeared, the American public as a whole had not yet escaped the aesthetic or unaesthetic view of their Puritan ancestors towards unutilitarian fiction.

One result of this stumbling-block was the fact that men relinquished the job of writing fiction for this didactic-minded public to the women. The majority of the early novels were written by women, about women, and for women. The masculine writers frankly keyed their work for women readers.²⁸ Women authors have a tendency to be more sentimental, more moralistic, and more censorious than men. In all these women-written novels there is a stress on fine sentiments, elegant taste, delicacy, and allied notions. For that

²⁷

P.M.L.A. LII, (1937) 195-214, XI Censure of Fiction in American Romances and Magazines 1789-1810, by G.H. Orians

²⁸ An examination of the titles given in The Early American Novel (Loshe) American Fiction -1774-1850 (Wright), Early American Fiction, 1774-1830 (Wegelin), and THE Sentimental Novel in America, 1789-1860 (Brown) will reveal a crushing superiority of novels "written by women, for women, about women", nor is this strange, for women alone had the time to read novels.

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matter, the same type of literature is with us today, but slightly influenced by the alterations of taste of the more advanced reader. Only women can successfully write for women the kind of drivel that they like and demand. Hawthorne's often-quoted letter to William Ticknor gives the opinion of a novelist-craftsman about the hordes of female hacks:

" America is now wholly given over to a damned mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash -- and should be ashamed of myself if I did succeed. What is the mystery of those innumerable editions of The Lamp-lighter, and other books neither better nor worse? -- worse they could not be, and better they need not be, when they sell by the 100,000 ..."29

Mrs. Hannah Webster Foster, one of the earliest of the women novelists, and a firm believer in the novel as a didactic medium, who wrote damnable but highly successful novels, was shrewd enough to put her finger on the reasons why the early American novels were so bad, Amelia, one of the characters of The Boarding School, stated:

" We are too much in a state of nature to write good novels yet," an observation that goes far in explaining the very low calibre of American fiction in the first few decades of its existence. A contributory factor was the fact that much of this fiction was written for publication serially in magazines, which made certain restrictions mandatory. These restrictions can be seen today in the fiction found in magazines such as Good Housekeeping, which is only negatively good. Imagine a nation where nine-tenths of the reading public were of the GoodHousekeeping type, and you will have an idea of the reading public of this earlier period.

Three general observations can be drawn from the evidence thus far presented; observations that hold good today. The implications of these observations cannot be ignored in any comprehensive consideration of the

29 C. Ticknor, Hawthorne and His Publisher (Boston, 1913), p. 141

American novel.

1) Quantitatively, the greater part of our literature is written primarily for women, by women. Hence a stress on didacticism and purpose becomes almost essential to the sub-literary level of the majority of the average American novels.

2) The great reading, paying, public likes its reading-matter moralistic and sentimental, and gets its novels keyed to its tastes. The majority of our great novelists are those whose books exhibit ideas a bit more advanced than those of the average reader of their own day.

3) Thanks to the work of didactic-minded reformers, the early novelists were in abject terror of their audiences, and the majority were unsuccessful in attempting to walk the tight-rope between art and morality. Then, as now, only the independent-minded authors wrote the better fiction.

declared against alcohol. While all of the novels of the first decade of American fiction speak out against these vices, it took forty years to reach the point where they could become the main subjects for purpose fiction. The purpose novel inspired by slavery was washed out in the blood-bath of the Civil War, the temperance novel became so ridiculous that no one took it seriously, but the fictional protests against the misadventures of our industrial civilization have continued with each year; indeed, they are the only type of these novels of protest that have done any constructive good.

A point that must be constantly borne in mind when evaluating the relative worth and effectiveness of any novel when it is primarily didactic or purposeful is that the reading public has not always had its ability to detect propaganda for what it is, and that in earlier years, the standard of goodness in fiction was not as pronounced as it is today. A novel that was fed on truth and honesty, and animated by noblest motives without flinching, was long-suffering. We judge the efforts that were grouped up as cheap and facile as the novels of the century by modern standards. Uncle Tom's Cabin, and The North and the South, or For the Love of Mary, General Tom, The Gates of Hell, even in its simplicity of purpose and execution.

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PART II

The Paper Civil War, 1836--1865

The more serious-minded observers of the American way of life early saw that all was not as it should be, and soon three reform projects began to intrude into the novel---criticism of slavery, and wage-slavery, and declamations against alcohol. While all of the novels of the first decade of American fiction speak out against these wrongs, it took from thirty to fifty years for them to reach the point where they could become the main subjects for purpose fiction. The purpose novel inspired by slavery was washed out in the blood-bath of the Civil War, the temperance novel became so ridiculous that no one took it seriously, but the fictional protests against the maladjustments of our industrial set-up have gained in influence with each year; indeed, they are the only type of these novels of protest that have done any constructive good.

A point that must be constantly borne in mind when estimating the relative worth and effectiveness of any novel whose aim is primarily didactic or purposeful is that the reading public has not always had its ability to detect propaganda for what it is, and that in earlier years, the aversion to preaching in fiction was not as pronounced as it is today. A people that were fed on Scott and Thackeray, and endured two-hour sermons without flinching, were long-suffering. We judge the effusions that were ground out to champion some favorite cause of the author by modern standards. Books like Uncle Tom's Cabin, and The North and the South, or that preachment Minnie Hermon; or, The Curse of Rum, seem to us composed of horror-scenes interlaced

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Harriet, or The Nurse of War, seem to us composed of horror-scenes inter- faced

with bare-faced preachments. Their scenes of suffering and abuse are over-drawn, melodramatic in the extreme, and the didacticism is extremely artless. the fact that Uncle Tom's Cabin is the only purpose novel that the average reader has ever heard of does not necessarily indicate that purpose fiction was unpopular; on the contrary, it outsold nine-tenths of what we now call the representative literature of its day. Since nothing is so dead in literature as an economic or social evil that has been reformed, sub-literary preachments against these defunct evils have little or no appeal to the present-day reader. All were characterized by an exaggeration of the evils of the situation; a sense of literary proportion was sadly lacking in all of them.

The attitude of the newspaper critics and the general reading public can be partially seen in a group of reviews that was printed in the pages at the back of Archy Moore, the White Slave, in praise of Francis Colburn Adams' Our World, an anti-slavery romance. The fact that the publisher collected them shows that they were views to which they were not hostile.

The Northern Christian Advocate: "John Wesley said the best tunes had long been in the service of the devil. He thought it was well to reclaim them for better purposes. The same is true of novels and romances--they have heretofore been almost exclusively devoted to either vice, or to a very questionable amusement. But the tide is turning. Fiction is beginning to serve the cause of virtue and humanity."

The Buffalo Morning News: "Its style is engaging, its logic weighty, and its deductions natural. It does not content itself with abusing an evil from a distance, but grapples and wrestles with it, right manfully."

The Boston Evening Gazette: "It is a work not to be thrown aside, but a work to be read and pondered over. The novel is a perfect melodrama for startling situations and effects, and we have never read a fictitious story which so completely engrossed one's attention from beginning to close."

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Speaking of Archy Moore, Lydia Maria Child, herself a famous author of abolition novels, made this trenchant observation:

"Why, my dear friend, it is a wonderful book. People of the dullest minds and wildest sympathies, are thrilled by it, as if their benumbed fingers had touched an electric chain."

The Plaindealer for April 8, 1837 said about Archy Moore:
 "Fiction never performs a nobler office than when she acts as the handmaiden of truth. It is in this capacity that her assistance has been invoked by the author of the work before us, and so well is the task accomplished that we can scarcely persuade ourselves, as we turn over the deeply interesting pages, that we are perusing a narrative of fictitious wrongs and sufferings." 30

In other words, these books were praised in their own day for just the elements that we now condemn. People of the "dullest minds" could not fail to follow the arguments of the authors, people with the "wildest sympathies" would slog through the moralizing to reach the parts intended to hold their attention. They weren't written as literature, but as tracts.

Adams gives the main purpose of these writers in Our World:

"We have but one great object in view--that of showing a large number of persons in the South, now held as slaves, who are by the laws of the land, as well as the laws of nature, entitled to their freedom." 31

The Civil War started officially when the men of Charleston fired on Fort Sumter on April 12th, 1861, but it had been fought on paper ever since 1836, when Nathaniel Beverley Tucker's The Partisan Leader was published. It recommended the economic freedom of the South, and sounded the first note of sectionalism in the American novel. In that same year the abolitionists first took to the novel, with the issuance of The Slave; or The Memoirs of Archy Moore by Richard Hildreth. 32

30 Our World (N.Y. 1855) back unlisted pages

31 Ibid p. 376

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Not all of the opposition to slavery came from the North, nor did all of the opposition to the abolitionists come from the South. The Southerners knew that their "peculiar institution" was not flawless, but they had geared up their entire economic set-up around it, and in the paper war that raged, the champions of that institution were committed to a wholly optimistic view of it. The reformers in the north bayed after slavery eagerly enough, but chose to ignore the evils of their industrial system. As Parrington said: "The inadequacy of southern thought was identical with that of northern; blinded by sectional economic interests, they saw only half the truth. They beheld the mote in a brother's eye, but considered not the beam that was in their own." 34

The same spirit that gave birth to Unitarianism, Mormonism, Millerism, Mesmerism, and allied enthusiasms of America's Sentimental Years was responsible for the agitation over slavery and labor abuses. On both sides, the voices of protest came from those who did not profit from the systems they attacked. In many cases, these reformers were also interested in other current attempts at reform. If the abolition writers and agitators had never gone beyond the other reformers, they would have been more or less ignored as harmless lunatics, but when they began to grow violent, and

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The Boston Atlas, for Dec. 24, 1836, an editorial written by John O. Sargent, Esq.

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The Romantic Revolution in America, 1800-1860, V. L. Parrington (N.Y. 1930) p.

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³⁴ The Romantic Revolution in America, 1800-1860, V. L. Partington (N.Y. 1930) p.

demanded imperiously that the slaves be granted immediate social and economic freedom, they encountered stiff opposition at home. Uncle Tom's Cabin brought the paper war to a literary battle in which every trick was used by both sides. While they all virtuously proclaimed that truth glowed from their every page, they used half-truths with great effectiveness. The half-truth has proved to be the strongest weapon that the purpose-novelist has in his arsenal. It combines the advantages of both truth and fiction -- the convincingness of the one, and the artfulness of the other. While the "Tale of Truth" ruse was occasioned by hinterland-opposition to novels in general, and hampered the early novelists, it was a distinct advantage to these ax-grinders, who repeatedly insisted that it was impossible to exaggerate the pathetic and sensational nature of the horrors portrayed. The technique is still in use, and forms the backbone of The Grapes of Wrath -- here we see the half-truth and over-sentimentalizing at work, though far more skillfully than in these anti-slavery novels. For that matter, these two disguises dominate all really effective propaganda.

The preface to Aunt Phillis's Cabin; or, Southern Life as It Is, (1852) one of the many Southern retorts to Mrs. Stowe, shows the charitable nature of the two sides, the use of the half-truth, and the glorification of their own way of life, and the damnation of the system attacked:

"1) Slavery authorized by God, permitted by Jesus Christ, sanctified by the apostles, maintained by good men of all ages, is still existing in a portion of our beloved country.

2) I do not intend to give a history of Abolition. Born in fanaticism, nurtured in violence and disorder, it exists too. Turning aside the institutions and commandments of God, treading under foot the love of country, despoiling the laws of nature and the nation, it is dead to every feeling of patriotism and brotherly love; full of strife and pride, strewn the path of the slave with thorns and of the master with difficulties, accomplishing nothing good, forever creating disturbances." 35

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c The study of the purpose fiction of the decade preceding the Civil War is of particular interest, for unlike temperance, there were two sides to be heard from, two sides that hit blow for blow. Their ammunition in the quarrel made thousands of people, unable to do thinking on their own, aware of the cleavage that was to split the North and South. It is this attack on mass inertia that is the chief function of the purpose novel. The writer of the purpose novel is almost never an original thinker who reaches his conclusions independently, but a popularizer who transfers the work of the few into a topic of discussion for the mob. Thousands who would never bother to read purely expository presentation of an evil, or pay attention to lecturers, will avidly espouse that same cause when it is presented to them with a thin sugar-coating of fiction. The fiction of slavery did just this: it made men on each side firmly believe that they were opposed by a system that had to be rooted out, if their own way of life was to endure.

The structure of all these novels is roughly the same: they have a main proposition to demonstrate, a romance, quite a few detours for debate, and several incidents to illustrate minor points. The Southern philosophy stemmed out of Aristotle's plan for society, as given in the Politica, that a patriarchal system was the best of all possible systems, the best adaption of government to insure the greatest good to the greatest number. From this viewpoint, capitalism became a decidedly inferior instrument of justice which had to be abolished, and replaced by slavery. The Northern philosophy said that capitalism was the only way, and stemmed out of Wilberforce and Adam Smith, and deplored slavery as barbarous, a serpent that must be crushed at all costs. When one side held that slavery was natural, nay, inevitable, that the negro was not fit for freedom, and knew himself to be an inferior, and in most cases, preferred to be a slave, and the opposition

The study of the purpose fiction of the decade preceding the Civil War is of particular interest, for unlike temperance, there were two sides to be heard from, two sides that hit blow for blow. Their ammunition in the quarrel made thousands of people, unable to do thinking on their own, aware of the cleavage that was to split the North and South. It is this attack on mass literature that is the chief function of the purpose novel. The writer of the purpose novel is almost never an original thinker who reaches his conclusions independently, but a popularizer who transfers the work of the law into a topic of discussion for the mob. Thousands who would never bother to read purely expository presentation of an evil, or pay attention to lectures, will avidly espouse that same cause when it is presented to them with a thin sugar-coating of fiction. The fiction of slavery did just this: it made men on each side firmly believe that they were opposed by a system that had to be rooted out, if their own way of life was to endure.

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held diametrically opposed views, and both sides rushed into fiction to expound these doctrines; excesses were bound to occur.

Despite the flood of these novels, there are but a few that are fit to read now: Uncle Tom's Cabin, The Ebony Idol, and Liberia; or, Mr. Peyton's Experiments. Even these are mediocre works when they are measured against the standards of first-rate fiction. They were all frankly intended to propagandize first, and amuse afterwards. The others are not worth reading. The following condensations of their plots will indicate their gamey flavor. Mr. Frank, the Underground Mail Agent (1853) tells of an agent for the Underground Railroad, who goes South, to find that a long-lost son is a planter. The agent's adopted daughter and the son work on him and by the time they announce their forthcoming marriage, the father has seen the error of his ways. The daughter, an artless lass of seventeen, effortlessly holds forth for several chapters on the complete philosophy of slavery, complete with illustrations. In The North and the South; or, Slavery and Its Contrasts (1852), Mrs. Rush creates for her reader a typical Northern family with a poor but honest, hard-working wife, a drunken husband, and nine children. The family suffer every misfortune that the author can think of -- the eldest daughter is a seamstress, over-worked, starved, insulted and tempted, only to die purely from consumption. The younger children are bound out to fiends who inflict all manner of injuries upon them -- beatings, tortures, imprisonments. The deus ex machina here is a Southern planter who rescues them, brings them to his plantation, and thus gives the author a beautiful opportunity (which she makes the most of) to show off the manifest superiority of the Southern way of life. A somewhat similar scheme is found in English Serfdom and American Slavery; or, Ourselves as Others See Us (1854) by

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 The family suffer every misfortune that the author can think of -- the eldest
 daughter is a seamstress, over-worked, starved, insulted and tempted, only
 to die purely from consumption. The younger children are bound out to families
 who inflict all manner of injuries upon them -- beatings, tortures, imprison-
 ments. The lost ex-merchant here is a Southern planter who rescues them,
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 opportunity (which she makes the most of) to show off the noblest superiority
 of the Southern way of life. A somewhat similar scheme is found in English
Slavery and American Slavery; or, Ourself as Others See Us (1852) by

Lucien Chase. Chase vents his spite upon the industrial system, but locates the scene of this modern Egyptian captivity in the English slums. His family of peasants suffer all the horrors of the factory system; child labor nearly proves too much for the children, and the father is taken by a press gang. You can well guess how Chase presents the Southern scene. Page's Uncle Robin in his Cabin in Virginia and Tom without one in Boston (1853) denounces the meddlings of the Northerners, and shows the evils they brought upon the slaves. He lashes out against cold-blooded Yankees who misuse their slaves if they have them, who deny employment to the free negroes in the North, fleece the run-aways, and allow them to die of neglect.³⁶ Archy Moore tells of the unhappy life of Archy, son of Col. Moore, of Virginia, and a mulatto mistress. Archy is the slave, his father the master, and to further complicate matters, Archy is married to another of the Colonel's bastards. Hildreth rings all the changes of horrors and bathos, but there is less cause to censure him, for he was the first to use these devices that were to become almost clichés.

A theory set forth by Clifton Fadiman applies to both sides in this war:

"The law of action and reaction being what it is, it is only natural that the passion for retaining the status quo should be as intense as the passion for remoulding the world. Frequently -- a fact which revolutionary theorists too often forget -- the two passions co-exist in the same person."³⁷

These authors stoutly defended their own way of life and thwacked sturdily at the customs of the barbarians who inhabited the other half of the country. This same theory goes far towards explaining why radicals

³⁶ It is interesting to note that a few years ago a survey of the descendants of the New England abolitionists who could afford to hire servants showed that none of them employed negroes, or had ever done so.

³⁷ The New Yorker, November 23, 1940, p. 75

laction Chase. Chase wrote his rights upon the industrial system, but located the name of this modern Egyptian captivity in the English slave. His family of peasants suffer all the horrors of the factory system; child labor really proved too much for the children, and the father is taken by a grass gang. You can well guess how Chase presents the Southern scene. Page's Uncle Robin in his Cabin in Virginia and Tom without one (1837) denounces the dealings of the Northmen, and shows the evils they brought upon the slaves. He lashes out against cold-blooded Yankees who mistreat their slaves. If they have them, who deny employment to the free negroes in the North, these the run-aways, and allow them to die of neglect. ³⁶ Uncle Robin tells of the unhappy life of Lucy, son of Col. Moore, of Virginia, and a mulatto mistress. Lucy is the slave, his father the master, and to further complicate matters, Lucy is married to another of the Colonel's bastards. History links all the changes of horrors and deaths, but there is less cause to condemn him, for he was the first to use these devices that were to become almost clichés.

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"The law of action and reaction being what it is, it is only natural that the passion for retaining the system should be as intense as the passion for abolishing it. The world, frequently -- a fact which revolutionists themselves too often forget -- the two passions co-exist in the same person." ³⁷

These authors stoutly defended their own way of life and threatened studiously at the customs of the Northerners who inhabited the other half of the country. This same theory goes far towards explaining why radicals ³⁸ It is interesting to note that a few years ago a survey of the descendants of the New England abolitionists who would afford to hire servants showed that none of them employed negroes, or had ever done so.

who die old, die conservatives. It seems hard to see why kindly people could write these vicious attacks, or so warp facts, unless we make allowances for this dichotomy. In a great many cases these natural reformers are thwarted from going to work against abuses in their immediate environment, and divert this drive into an abuse a little further away, an abuse on which they are not particularly qualified to speak. The very fact that they will attack something that is vastly more complex than they represent it to be, often gives their work a temporary interest that it would lack if they really knew what they were talking about. This vicarious sympathy teams up with the tendency to over-state the side of the reformer and correspondingly vilify the system responsible for the evil to father the marked distortion of all didactic and purpose novels. If the author had an impartial view-point, he would write a novel that would fail miserably in its purpose, and seeing that the majority of this school of authors have little artistic ability, the novel would probably be an inartistic botch. If you are going to expose an evil, your character, must of necessity be more or less of a puppet; if he is allowed to think and act for himself, he is a poor vehicle for propaganda. The skill comes in concealing this subservience to the purpose. The runaway slave, Jim, of Huckleberry Finn, is a real character, but hardly a character that inspires much thought one way or the other on the slavery question.

Nearly all of the authors participating in this battle were persons genuinely interested in the problem, persons to whom the royalty check was not the sole incentive. The Abolitionists were all sincere, honest, men and women. There was no abolitionist comparable to John Gough, the temperance white hope, who vanished for about a week: while his friends suspected that

who die old, die conservative. It seems hard to see why kindly people could write these violent attacks, or so many letters, unless we make allowances for this dichotomy. In a great many cases these natural reformers are thrown from going to work against abuses in their immediate environment, and divert this drive into an abuse a little further away, an abuse on which they are not particularly qualified to speak. It is very hard that they will attack something that is vastly more complex than they represent it to be, often gives their work a temporary interest that it would lack if they really knew what they were talking about. This vicious sympathy comes up with the tendency to over-state the side of the reformer and correspondingly vilify the system responsible for the evil to which the reformer is making objection of all didactic and purpose novels. If the author had an impartial view-point, he would write a novel that would tell sincerely in its purpose, and seeing that the majority of this school of authors have little artistic ability, the novel would probably be an inartistic patch. If you are going to expose an evil, your character, must of necessity be more or less of a puppet; if he is allowed to think and act for himself, he is a poor vehicle for propaganda. The skill comes in concealing this subservience to the purpose. The true my slave, Jim, of Huckleberry Finn, is a real character, but hardly a character that inspires much thought one way or the other on the slavery question.

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the whisky forces had done away with him, John went on a three-days debauch in a Brooklyn bawdy house. When discovered, he virtuously proclaimed that he had been given a raspberry phosphate in a New York hotel, and that was the last thing he remembered until his friends rescued him from the clutches of his foes, and succeeded in making them believe ~~that~~ him. The authors were respectable men and women, often ministers or minister's wives. Many of the leading female authors of sentimental fiction championed the cause of the slave, and the most able of the defenders of the "particular institution" was Mrs. Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of the highly successful Godey's Lady's Book. From the excess of zeal and lack of writing-craft, these people seem to have been much like those good souls who write letters of protest to the editors of the Herald or the Transcript; but instead of mere letters, they expanded the argumentative protests to novel-length.

While these writers misused every device of the fiction-writers of the day, they were unable to combine those parts into a readable whole. Mrs. Stowe was the only one with any signs of talent. Her Uncle Tom's Cabin and Dred, while they place didacticism first, do contain a more reasoned presentation of the problem. Mrs. Stowe knew quite a bit about her subject, and did not paint slavery as a continued, unmitigated hell, but showed that even at its best, it was not right. Most people condemn Uncle Tom because of the play, which does not include the better aspects of the book, and emphasized⁵ the worst ones. Uncle Tom is a work that has many merits despite its preachments and bathos, and Dred is even better. It is hard to appreciate the good qualities of these two books unless you have read other novels on the slavery problem. Uncle Tom had a power denied most books -- that of stirring up such opposition that books were written specifically to refute

the whisky forces had done away with him, John went on a three-days fast in a Brooklyn party house. When discovered, he virtuously proclaimed that he had been given a raspberry phosphate in a New York hotel, and that was the last thing he remembered until his friends rescued him from the clutches of his foes, and succeeded in making them believe that he was the author of the respectable man and woman, often ministers or ministers' wives. Many of the leading female authors of sentimental fiction abandoned the cause of the slave, and the most able of the defenders of the "particular institution" was Mrs. Sarah Joseph Hale, editor of the highly successful Godey's Lady's Book. From the excess of zeal and lack of willing-heart, these people seem to have been much like those good souls who write letters of protest to the editors of the Herald or the Transcript; but instead of mere letters, they expanded the argumentative protests to novel-length.

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it. In the three years between 1852-1854 there were at least fourteen novels written from the Southern viewpoint, novels that sought to offset the influence of Mrs. Stowe's preachment. Indeed, this torrent of retorts was so great that it seems to have exhausted the materials, for there seems to have been no pro-slavery novels during the years 1855-1859.

The only serious suggestion to a workable solution to the slavery problem was made by Mrs. Hale. The title and sub-title of her book tell what the nature of these solutions were -- Liberia, or Mr. Peyton's Experiments. After an attempt at paternalistic gradual emancipation, based upon the methods employed in the case of the English serfs, and a special slave settlement here in North America, the kindly planter sends all of his surviving slaves back to Africa, to the newly founded slave republic of Liberia. As a novel, Liberia is rather pathetic, but it is about the only piece of decent reasoning presented for the Southern side. Mrs. Hale had the necessary detachment and realized that the slavery question would eventually have to be solved, and while she clearly indicated that the negro is inferior she attempted to give a solution that would be practical for both slave and master. The book is a very convincing tract, backed up with a long index of documents on Liberia, and Mrs. Hale can't be blamed because history proved her wrong.

The torrent of fiction proselyting for one side or the other of the slavery question can well be taken as typical of all pure purpose fiction. The list given at the end of this section contains better than fifty titles, and out of all these books, the only one that is of any literary interest is Uncle Tom. At least twenty-five of these books were inspired by it, but there isn't a one of them that had a tenth of the merit of the original. In all the temperance novels, however, there wasn't a single decent one in the

it, in the three years between 1852-1854 there were at least fourteen novels written from the Southern viewpoint, novels that sought to offset the influence of Mrs. Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Indeed, this torrent of novels was so great that it seems to have exhausted the materials, for there seems to have been no pro-slavery novels during the years 1855-1859.

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The torrent of fiction overflowing for one side or the other of the slavery question can well be taken as typical of all pure partisan fiction. The list given at the end of this section contains better than fifty titles, and out of all these books, the only one that is of any literary interest is *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. At least twenty-five of these books were inspired by it, but there isn't one of them that had a tenth of the merit of the original. In all the temperance novels, however, there wasn't a single merit one in the

lot, and there were far more of them written.

The contrast between Uncle Tom's Cabin and its unsuccessful progeny will serve to partially illustrate those factors which go to make up an effective purpose novel. Mrs. Stowe gave us the feelings of the times, she wrote from a good knowledge of the subject and human conduct, and despite the fact that the desire for reform was uppermost in her mind when she wrote it, she has not subdued her characters to her desire for reform. While her story was straight propaganda, she did not make the mistake of depicting the evil out of proportion to a complete picture of contemporary life. It is a truism of purpose fiction that the only effective novels of this type are those that have characters that live of themselves. Indeed, it would seem that the more interested the author becomes in his purpose, the more the novel will suffer. Certainly, if zeal and utter sincerity of purpose were enough to insure success in purpose fiction, there would be as many masterpieces among these literary culls as we now have in all our literature.

The novels of the Paper Civil War prove that purpose fiction can be a great aid in arousing national sentiment behind a project, and can cause unthinking people to become aware of problems which would otherwise escape their notice. They show how half-truths and over-sentimentalizing should and should not be used. Unlike dueling, gaming, and novel-reading, slavery was a problem that was susceptible to the pressure of public opinion, and novels which dealt with that problem had a far greater chance for success. Temperance-reform was not susceptible to the pressure of public opinion, and the temperance novels, dealt with in the next section, proved to be ineffectual.

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Partial Bibliography of Abolition Novels

- The Slave; or, the Memoirs of Archy Moore (1836) Richard Hildreth
- The Evils of Slavery and the Cure of Slavery (1839) Lydia Maria Child
- An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans (1841) L.M. Child
- Uncle Tom's Cabin; or Life Among the Lowly (1852) Mrs. Harriet B. Stowe
- Manuel Pereira; or, the Sovereign State of North Carolina (1853) F. C. Adams
- Our World, an Anti-Slavery Romance (1855) F.C. Adams
- The Quadroon (1856) Charles Mayne Reid
- Slavery Unmasked (1856) P. Tower
- Neighbor Jackwood (1857) John Townsend Trowbridge
- Dred, a Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp (1857) Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe
- Fifty Years in Chains (1859) Anon.
- The Mustee (1859) B.F. Presbury
- Married or Single (1859) Catherine Maria Sedgwick
- Our Nig (1859) H. E. Wilson
- Maum Guinea (1861) Metta Victoria Victor
- The Unionist's Daughter (1862) " " "
- Among the Pines (1862) J. R. Gilmore
- Ruth's Sacrifice (1863) E. C. Pearson
- Peculiar (1864) Epes Sargent
- A Romance of the Republic (1867) Lydia Maria Child
- Autobiography of a Female Slave (1857) M. Griffiths
- Caruthers - the Kentuckian in New York (n.d.) William Alexander

Partial List of Pro-Slavery Novels

- Swallow Barn (1832-1852) J. P. Kennedy
- Northwood, or Life North and South, showing the true character of both (1827) Mrs. Sarah J. Hale

Partial Bibliography of Abolition Novels

- The Slave; or, the Memoirs of Arthur Moore (1835) Richard Hilditch
- The Evil of Slavery and the Cure of Slavery (1839) Lydia Maria Child
- An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans (1841) L.M. Child
- Uncle Tom's Cabin; or Life Among the Lowly (1852) Mrs. Harriet B. Stowe
- Manuel Peralta; or, the Sovereign State of North Carolina (1853) F. O. Adams
- Our World, an Anti-Slavery Romance (1855) F. O. Adams
- The Quaker (1856) Charles James Field
- Slavery Unmasked (1856) P. Tower
- Neighbor Jackson (1857) John Townsend Trowbridge
- Dred, a Tale of the Great Olden Swamp (1857) Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe
- Fifty Years in Chains (1859) Anon.
- The Master (1859) E. F. Presbury
- Married or Single (1859) Catherine Maria Sedgwick
- Our Man (1859) H. E. Wilson
- Sam Caines (1861) Maria Victoria Victor
- The Uncle's's Daughter (1862) " " "
- Among the Pines (1862) J. H. Gilmore
- Rich's Sacrifice (1862) E. C. Pearson
- Reveries (1864) Knox Bryant
- A Romance of the Republic (1867) Lydia Maria Child
- Autobiography of a Female Slave (1867) M. Griffiths
- Caruthers - the Kentuckian in New York (n.d.) William Alexander

Partial List of Pro-Slavery Novels

- Swallow Bait (1832-1833) J. P. Kennedy
- Northwood, or Life North and South, showing the true character of both (1837) Mrs. Sarah L. Hale

<u>The Partisan Leader</u> (1836)	Nathaniel B. Tucker
<u>Aunt Phillis's Cabin</u> (1852)	M. Eastman
<u>The Cabin and the Parlor</u> (1852)	J.T. Randolph
<u>The North and the South; or, Slavery and its Contrasts</u> (1852)	Caroline E. Rush
<u>Frank Freeman's Barber Shop</u> (1852)	Rev. Bayard R. Frank
<u>Mapleton</u> (1853)	Parcellus Church
<u>Mr. Frank, the Underground Mail Agent</u> (1853)	"Vidi"
<u>Anti-Fanaticism, a tale of the South</u> (1853)	Martha Hines Burt
<u>Uncle Robin in his Cabin in Virginia, and Tom without one in Boston</u> (1853)	J.W. Page
<u>Hatchie, the Guardian Slave</u> (1853)	W.T. Adams(Oliver Optic)
<u>Liberia; or Mr. Peyton's Experiments</u> (1853)	Mrs. Sarah Josepha Hale
<u>Uncle Tom's Cabin contrasted with Buckingham Hall, the Planter's Home</u> (1854)	R. Criswell
<u>English Serfdom and American Slavery, or as others see us</u> (1854)	Lucien Chase
<u>The Master's House; a tale of Southern life</u> (1854)	Thomas Thorpe Long
<u>The Planter's Northern Bride</u> (1854)	Mrs. Caroline L. Hentz
<u>Robert Graham</u> (1855)	" " " "
<u>Canibals All</u> (1857)	George Fitzhugh
<u>Douglas Farm</u> (1858)	M.E. Bradley
<u>The Sunny South</u> (1860)	J. H. Ingraham
<u>The Black Gauntlet</u> (1860)	Mrs. M.H. Schoolcraft
<u>Slaveholder Abroad</u> (1860)	W.T. Thompson
<u>The Ebony Idol, by a Lady of New England</u> (1860)	Mrs. G. M. Flanders
<u>The Yankee Slave Dealer</u> (1860)	Annou.
<u>The Sable Cloud</u> (1861)	Rev. Nehemiah Adams
<u>Nellie Norton</u> (1864)	E. W. Warren
<u>Chivalry, Slavery, and Young America</u> (1866)	John Burke

PART III

The Struggles Against The Curse of Rum

A mellow old gentleman who once lectured at 688 Boylston Street stated anent the Curse of Rum:

"Rum I take to be the name which unwashed moralists apply alike to the product distilled from molasses and the noblest juices of the vineyard. Burgundy 'in all its sunset glow' is rum. Champagne, soul 'of the foaming grape of Eastern France,' is rum. Hock, which our friend, the Poet, speaks of as

'The Rhine's breastmilk, gushing cold and bright,
Pale as the moon, and maddening as her light,'
is rum. Sir, I repudiate the loathsome vulgarism as an insult to the first miracle of the Founder of our religion!" 38

Further on in the same essay Holmes states:

"Among the gentlemen that I have known, few, if any, were ruined by drinking. My few drunken acquaintances were generally ruined before they became drunkards. The habit of drinking is often a vice, no doubt, -- sometimes a misfortune, --as when an almost irresistible hereditary propensity exists to indulge in it,-- but oftenest of all a punishment." 39

But Holmes was a doctor and a good liver, who was not, in this respect, in tune with the militant temperance that raged in numerous novels from 1842 until 1931. A goodly number of fictional volleys against the Demon Rum were fired during this time, and the list starts and stops with books written by authors whose fame happily rests on their other works -- Walt Whitman and Upton Sinclair.

Few people know that Walt Whitman wrote novels, but thirteen years before he issued Leaves of Grass he ground out a pot-boiler in three days' time that sold 20,000 copies, a picaresque preachment entitled Franklin

38 The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table as given in American Poetry and Prose, (Norman Foerster, editor) p. 753

39 Ibid, p. 753

PART III

The Struggle Against The Curse of Race

A well-known old gentleman who once lectured at 188 Boylston Street stated

about the Curse of Race:
 "Now I take to be the same which unnumbered mortals apply alike to
 the product distilled from molasses and the noblest juices of the
 vineyard. But surely 'in all the world' grow, in rum, Champagne, and
 'at the fountain-head of Western France,' as rum, brandy, which our
 friends, the East, use as a
 'The drink's a precious one, /
 Pale as the moon, and glowing as her light,'
 is rum. Sir, I regard the fact that the fact that the fact that the
 the first miracle of the power of our religion!"

Further on in the same essay follows a statement:
 "Among the gentlemen that I have known, few, if any, were without
 by drinking. By few drunken gentlemen were generally retained
 before they became drunkards. The habit of drinking is often a
 vice, no doubt, -- sometimes a disease, -- and when almost
 irresistible hereditary propensity exists to indulge in it, --
 but treatment of all a punishment." 22

But Holmes was a doctor and a good liver, who was not, in this respect

in tune with the militant temperance that reigned in numerous novels from
 1843 until 1937. A goodly number of fictional volleys against the Demon Rum
 were fired during this time, and the list starts and stops with books
 written by authors whose names have happily risen on their other works -- Walt
 Whitman and Helen Sinclair.

For people know that Walt Whitman wrote novels, but fifteen years
 before he wrote Leaves of Grass he ground out a pot-boller in three days,
 time that sold 25,000 copies, a place-holder for the Franklin

22 The Journal of the President as given in American Poetry and
Prose, (Norman Foerster, editor) p. 103

Evans; or, The Inebriate, A Tale of the Times. In later years, the Good Grey Poet tried to disclaim authorship of this opus, and when Traubel finally trapped him into admitting that he wrote it, he explained it off as a product of need, that the seventy-five dollars his publishers offered for it overcame any scruples he might have had.⁴⁰

"I set to work at once on it (with the help of a bottle of port or what not.) In three days of constant work I finished the book. Finished the book? Finished myself. It was damned rot, rot of the worst sort--not insincere, perhaps, but rot nevertheless: it was not the business for me to be up to. I stopped right there; I never cut a chip off that kind of timber again." ⁴¹

The pious denunciation of his later years does not accord with his concluding sentence in chapter twenty-five of the book:

"To conclude, I would remark that, if my story met with that favor which writers are perhaps too fond of relying upon, my readers may hear from me again, in the method similar to that which has already made us acquainted." THE AUTHOR ⁴²

Fiction's loss in this case was poetry's gain, for it was not lack of public support that made Walt Whitman abandon the novel, for any man that can sell better than 20,000 copies is not a commercial failure.

Although it is the first of the pure temperance novels, and has all of the ramblings of the picaresque tale, Franklin Evans is better than the typical temperance novel. It has the traditional appeal to TRUTH contained in its title, and buttressed in the introduction:

"And I would ask your belief when I assert that what you are going to read is not a work of fiction, as the term is used. I narrate instances that have had a far more substantial existence, than in my fancy." ⁴³

He claims an unimpeachable authority for the employment of fiction to combat the drink-peril:

⁴⁰ It sold so well that the publishers gave him an additional fifty dollars.

⁴¹ Emory Holloway's introduction to the Merrymount Press Edition, (N.Y. 1929) pp. v-vi

⁴² Ibid, last page

⁴³ Ibid, introduction, p. 3

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public support that made Wells Whitman abandon the novel, for any man could

sell better than 20,000 copies in not a commercial failure.

Although it is the first of the pure romance novels, and has all

of the rambling of the picturesque tale, Franklin Evans is better than the

typical romance novel. It has the traditional appeal to TRUTH contained

in its title, and buttressed in the introduction:

"And I would ask your belief when I assert that what you are going

to read is not a work of fiction, as the title is used. I narrate in-

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41 Henry Holloway's introduction to the Harpocrat Press Edition, (N.Y. 1922)

42 Ibid, last page

43 Ibid, last page

44 Ibid, Introduction, p. 3

"Without being presumptuous, I would remind those who believe in the wholesome doctrines of abstinence, how the earlier teachers of piety used parables and fables, as the fit instruments whereby they might convey to men the beauty of the system they professed. In the resemblance how reasonable it is to suppose that you can impress a lesson upon him whom you would influence to sobriety, in no better way than letting him read such a story as this." ⁴⁴

But Whitman is more attached to his story than he is to his moral instruction and you feel no more sense of a lesson than you do after reading of the antics of Jack Wilton or Peregrine Pickle. A man that spent a good deal of his time at Pfaff's Beer Cellar and wrote the book with the aid of the very evil he thundered against could not have really had his heart in his work. The pay-check, and not moral reform, was the inspirer of Franklin Evans. Whitman's sense of the ridiculous kept him from being the Mrs. Stowe of temperance fiction.

Upton Sinclair's The Wet Parade is a dismal failure, both as a novel and as propaganda. An involved defense of prohibition when the rest of the country had seen it was worse than the evil that it was created to prevent, it is all purpose and little or no art. Even in his best novels, Sinclair places artistic considerations secondary to propagandizing, and The Wet Parade is one of his worst novels.

Thus, over a ninety-year period during which authors assailed Rum, there was not a single book among their output that could be called good fiction. The problem of writers of temperance fiction was harder than those of the other writers of purpose fiction. The uses of humor were ruled out, and an unflagging opposition to Rum in any of its forms was mandatory; no half-way measures were possible. The slightest spirit of compromise meant a weakening of the major thesis. The only people that took these books

"Without being presumptuous, I would remind those who believe in the wholesome doctrine of abstemiousness, how the earlier teachers of Christianity used parables and fables, as the fit instruments whereby they might convey to men the beauty of the system they professed. In the estimation of how reasonable it is to suppose that you can impress a lesson upon him whom you would influence to nobility, in no better way than letting him read such a story as this."

But Whitman is more attached to his story than he is to his moral instruction and you feel no more sense of a lesson than you do after reading

of the antics of Jack Wilson or Peregrine Pickle. A man that spent a good deal of his time at Platt's Beer Cellar and wrote the book with the aid of the very evil he thundered against could not have really had his heart in his work. The pay-check, and not moral reform, was the inspirer of Franklin. Whitman's sense of the ridiculous kept him from being the true, above

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seriously were those who were not affected by the problem. The most famous of all the literary assaults on the old Enemy, T.S. Arthur's Ten Nights in a Bar-room, and What I Saw There (1854) became a household classic, and Pratt's stage version of it was a worthy rival of Aiken's adaptation of Uncle Tom's Cabin. The very fact that it needed but little alteration to become a melodrama that can still hold its own on Broadway, shows that it contained sensational, if not solid material. But unlike Uncle Tom, Ten Nights didn't inspire its readers to action. People admired it for its melodrama, not for messages it contained.

Nearly all temperance novels were fictional amplifications of that famous Currier and Ives lithograph of The Drunkard's Progress -- from the first glass through progressive degeneration to the grave. Between each incident, the authors would insert long commentaries and moralizings. This incidental treatment made for large doses of the horrors. Happenings that even the script-writers for the most lurid books of comics for little children would shy clear of are used freely. The same spirit that made Puritan New England give its children Foxe's Book of Martyrs to read re-appeared in the writers of temperance fiction. Every form of wanton cruelty and viciousness was displayed, with the excuse that it was an aid in clinching the case for the prosecution.

The temperance tale at its worst is exemplified in that old Chamber of Horrors entitled Minnie Hermon; or, The Curse of Rum, A Tale for the Times (1857), by Thurlow Weed Brown. The preface states:

"You will bear in mind that every chapter in the book is DRAWN FROM LIFE, with the necessary change of names and dates -- the only difficulty having been in selecting from the mass of materials collected during an active participation in the Temperance Reform. Those living who have a vivid remembrance of the scenes herein detailed, will appreciate our object in sketching them.

The history of the 'Watt Family' was written with a throbbing nib, and its truth sealed with the endorsement of a scalding tear.

seriously entertained who were not affected by the disease. The most famous of all the literary manuscripts on the old history, T.S. Arthur's Top History in a Barrow, and What I Saw There (1854) became a household classic, and first stage version of it was a worthy rival of Aiken's adaptation of Uncle Tom's Cabin. The very fact that it needed but little alteration to become a melodrama that was still held its own on Broadway, shows that it contained sensational, if not solid material. But unlike Uncle Tom, Tom Miller didn't inspire its readers to action. People admired it for its melodrama, not for messages it contained.

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The temperance tale at its worst is exemplified in that old chapter of horrors entitled Wanda's Warning, or, The Dances of Hell, a tale for the times

(1837), by Thurston Wood Brown. The preface states: "You will hear in what every chapter in the book is drawn from life, with the necessary change of names and dates -- the only difference having been in selecting from the mass of materials collected during an active participation in the temperance cause. Those living who have a vivid remembrance of the scenes herein detailed, will appreciate our object in sketching them. The history of the 'Hell Family' was written with a shocking aim, and its truth sealed with the endorsement of a scolding bear."

If our record shall arouse a single heart to a more inveterate hatred against the GREAT WRONG, our object will have been accomplished.
 Pass On." 45

Remember this pious declaration of Truth Triumphant as a summary is given of some of the events of the story. Brown, in his introduction, makes as sweeping an indictment of temperance fiction as can be found anywhere, although he intended it to do just the opposite:

"The literature of our reform is assuming a more refined and elevated character, and clothing great truths in pure and attractive garb; and never was there wider field for the exercise of intellectual effort. The wildest dreams of fiction seem tame in comparison with the stern and sober realities of our cause. Tragedies, more fearfully dark and startling than Avon's bard ever sketched, are thickly traced on the record of rum's history. Scenes which would mock the artist's pencil are of daily occurrence. The desolate home, with its heart-broken wife and mother, with her pale cheek channelled with tears of unutterable woe, as she bends weeping over the drunken wreck of her youth's idol; the child-group shivering in the blast or clinging to that mother, as they moan for bread; the orphan turned out, with no friend but God, into the wide world; youth wrecked and palsied with premature age; manhood reeling amid the ruins of mind and moral beauty, the sepulchre of a thousand hopes; genius driveling in idiocy and crumbling into ruin; the virtuous and noble-minded turning away from truth and honor, and plunging into every vice; the parent and citizen wandering away from a home-heaven, through a devious and dark pilgrimage, to a dishonored grave; the home-idol shivered and broken, the altar cast down, and an Eden transformed into a hell; childhood and innocence thrust out from the love-light of a mother's eye, to wallow in all that is low and vile; Poverty and Want looking with pinched and piteous gaze upon the scanty tribute of charity; foul and festering Vice, with sickly and bloated features, leering and drooling in licentious beastiality; Madness, with fiery eye and haggard mien, weeping and wailing and cursing in the rayless night of intellectual chaos; Crime, with its infernal 'ha! ha!' as it stalks forth from its work of death, with its red hand dripping with the hot and smoking life-tide of its victim; -- these, and ten thousand other combinations of warp and woof, are woven into tales of wondrous intensity and power. The hovel, the dram-shop, the subterranean den, and mansion of fashion and wealth, have all furnished the material for tales of startling interest. When fiction even has called up its weird creations, they have been but copies of facts already transpired. The moral is always there. Thus poetry and romance have combined to place the realities of two opposing principles in striking contrast." 46

45 Minnie Hermon (N.Y. & Cincinnati, 1878) preface (unnumbered)

46 Ibid, Introduction, xxvi & xxvii

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42 Wanda Barton (N.Y. & Cincinnati, 1878) preface (unnumbered)

43 Ibid., introduction, xvi & xvii

Brown wasn't over-stating the case, for he uses nearly all these situations in his book. The temperance writers made the most of these and the "ten thousand other combinations of warp and woof of wondrous intensity."

The story is claimed to be the true tale^{of} a Mr. Fenton, who claims responsibility for causing the deaths of no less than seven persons, all through his sottish attachments to the Curse of Rum -- his parents, his wife, and four sons. The yarn that he spins has as its two leading characters Minnie Hermon, the Rum-seller's daughter, and Walter Braydon, her lover. Walter's father was a drunkard, whose wife died through neglect, after her husband had pawned her Bible and her wedding jewels for Rum. Minnie's father was a drunkard, and her mother died in a hovel, and was buried as a pauper; even her wedding-ring was sold for Rum. At her death, she made her husband place his hand in Minnie's and make a solemn and sacred vow to never visit a tavern or drink again. He merely went on drinking like a fish, and opened his own tavern.

One of the charming scenes in the opening chapters takes the reader to an ice-cold attic where he finds a maniac-wife who died of starvation and cold. Her ten-year-old child is starving, and over in the corner is found the corpse of the father, who has been dead for ten days. All this woe was the work of Rum.

Young McGarr, the son of the liquorish Deacon McGarr, gets tipsy at a house-raising, stands on the ridge-top swilling out of a jug, falls, and has his skull smashed like a pumpkin.

Farmer Ricks becomes a slave to Rum, spends his all in Hermon's tavern, and sells everything he owns -- farm, goods, and even his wife's wedding-ring. One night, he and his father, an old Revolutionary war veteran, stagger home

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The story is claimed to be the true tale of Mr. Weston, who claims responsibility for causing the deaths of no less than seven persons, all

through his selfish attachments to the Curse of Rum -- his parents, his wife, and four sons. The yarn that he spins has as its two leading characters Minnie Horton, the Rum-seller's daughter, and Walter Brydson, her lover. Walter's father was a drunkard, whose wife died through neglect, after her husband had pawned her Bible and her wedding jewels for Rum. Minnie's father was a drunkard, and her mother died in a hotel, and was buried as a pauper; even her wedding-ring was sold for Rum. At her death, she made her husband place his hand in Minnie's and make a solemn and sacred vow to never visit a tavern or drink again. He merely went on drinking like a fish, and opened his own tavern.

One of the charming scenes in the opening chapters takes the reader to an ice-cream parlor where he finds a husband-wife who died of starvation and cold. Her ten-year-old child is starving, and over in the corner is found the corpse of the father, who has been dead for ten days. All this was the work of Rum.

Young McGarr, the son of the Liverpool Baron McGarr, gets tipsy at a house-keeping, stands on the ridge-top swilling out of a jug, falls, and has his skull smashed like a pumpkin.

Former Rick's becomes a slave to Rum, spends his all in Horton's tavern, and sells everything he owns -- farm, goods, and even his wife's wedding-ring. One night, he and his father, an old Revolutionary war veteran, stagger home

from the tavern in a snowstorm. The father falls in a drunken stupor and then freezes to death, while Ricks, who didn't even miss him, goes home in a besotted fury, cleaves his wife's skull apart with a fire-shovel, flings his baby into the fire, where it is all consumed but for a ^bn arm and shoulder, breaks his son's arm, and then beats him against the fireplace jams until he has smashed all life from him. This blood bath adds four more deaths to Rum's tally. Ricks is tried, found guilty, but escapes, repents, becomes a hermit, and a mighty force in destroying the destroyer, Rum.

Harry Dunham is a chronic drunkard, whose wife dies of neglect. One bright morning, they find Dunham and his flaxen-haired little daughter lying on the bottom of the mill-pond. Dunham has his little girl in one hand, and the shattered handle of a jug firmly clenched in the other.

The Watt family is next on the list of the proscribed -- Watt is a sot, and neglects his family. Bertha, his wife, dies of starvation, neglect and consumption. The father drinks on, making his children earn rum-money for him, and the younger children were struck off at auction, and put out to be kept by the lowest bidder ---- "One child-sister of four years - a sweet child in rags, whose tiny hands had never wronged a being on earth, and who could never know why she was a pauper -- found cold-hearted keepers, and in the winter time, died in the entry-way upon rags for bedding, and covered with vermin, no mother's hand leading her into the shadowy land, or sister's kiss warming upon the chilly lip." ⁴⁷ Bernard Watt, another child, dies from lack of care. The one remaining daughter goes to the tavern to try to get back her mother's Bible and influence Hermon not to sell her father any more Rum. Hermon sends her away, and slams the door on her. The step was

47

Ibid, p. 220

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 proceeds to death, while Rick, who didn't even kiss him, goes home in a
 desolate way, leaves his wife's skull apart with a fire-shovel, flings his
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icy, the closing door knocked her down, she fell on the stones, and was killed. James Watt died a pauper by the roadside.

Whitney, a reformed drunkard, is tempted by Hermon, and the next morning his mangled cadaver was found crushed among the broken buckets of the wheel of the grist-mill.

After reading a few of these books, the reader readily notes that all of these horrid happenings follow a definite pattern. No crime, vice, or misfortune escapes being allied with Rum; nay, they are made dependent upon Rum. Minnie Hermon goes on for many more chapters than are covered above, each case more lurid and depraved than the one before, with a long sermon between each passage.

The dime novel, condemned by a great proportion of the American public, began in the forties, and reached its stride in the sixties and seventies. Both in ethics and morals, the dime-novel was several cuts above the majority of either slavery or temperance novels, which, because they were written for pious purposes, could wallow in scenes that were beneath the level of the dime-novel. But it is only these monstrous happenings that make these tracts fit to read. They are but pedestrian sermons when these lurid imaginings are taken away. The most outrageous thing about the whole situation is that these incredible events are put forth as Gospel truth, truths that have been understated to avoid the full import of their horrors. You will remember Brown's pious declaration in his preface of the veracity of the mishaps of the Watt family. These "unwashed moralists" who despised the novel for itself, proscribed it for furthering their own cause. Objecting to the novel because it was not, etc., etc., they went far beyond the very evils they denounced. Their novels suffer from two flaws, or two aspects of the same fault, de-

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pending on how you look at the problem; either they have no factual basis, and rely too much on too much imagination, or they present facts without imagination to bring them into focus. Again a lack of selection and proportion can be blamed for the utter failure of temperance fiction, both as propaganda and as art.

Any compromise at all with Rum weakened the arguments, and the man who took a drink once a year was just as bad as the drunkard. The confirmed sot of these novels is guilty of damnable villainies, evils unequalled in any other type of fiction, past or present. Everything is depicted in dazzling whites and sooty blacks, and humor never reared its ugly head. A first-rate, or even a third-rate novelist, would have never ground out one of these literary crimes against society, for his talents would have incapacitated him from doing a job that temperance men would have liked. The fact that no one came out for Rum's defense in the novel made the lack of hard reasoning and proportion all the worse.

Some titles of these excrescences will indicate their level: Henry Lovell; a Temperance Story for Old and Young, The Bar-rooms at Brantly; or, The Great Hotel Speculation, Saved as By Fire; a Story Illustrating How One of Nature's Noblemen was Saved from the Demon of Drink, Ten Nights in a Bar-room, and What I Saw There, Women to the Rescue, a Story of the New Crusade. Edith Morton, or Temperance versus Intemperance, My Drunken Life, in fifteen chapters from 1825 to 1847, The True History of Deacon Giles's Distillery, Dick Wilson, the Rum-seller's Victim, Champagne Charlie; or, the "Sports of New York", Three Years in a Man-Trap, The Mysterious Parchment; or, the Satanic Licence, Elsie Magoon; or, the Old Still-house in the Hollow, The First Glass of Wine; or, Clarence Morton, The Sting of

depending on how you look at the problem; either they have no factual basis, and rely too much on too much imagination, or they present facts without imagination to bring them into focus. Again a lack of selection and proportion can be blamed for the utter failure of temperance fiction, both as propaganda and as art.

Any compromise at all with the arguments, and the man who took a drink once a year was just as bad as the drunkard. The confession out of these novels is guilty of damnable villainies, evils unqualified in any other type of fiction, past or present. Everything is depicted in disgusting whites and sooty blacks, and humor never reared its ugly head. A first-rate, or even a third-rate novelist, would have never ground out one of these literary crimes against society, for his talents would have been wasted in doing a job that that temperance man would have liked. The fact that no one came out for Ham's defense in the novel made the lack of hard reasoning and proportion all the worse.

Some titles of these excruciations will indicate their level: Henry Lovell: a Temperance Story for Old and Young, The Bar-room at Brantley's, The Great Hotel Assassination, Saved as By Fire: a Story Illustrating How One of Nature's Noblemen was Saved from the Demon of Drink, Ten Nights in a Bar-room, and What I Saw There, Women to the Rescue, a Story of the War, Crusade, Edith Morton, or Temperance versus Intemperance, My Humble Life, in fifteen chapters from 1825 to 1847, The True History of Benson Gilson, McMillen, Dick Wilson, the Hum-buller's Victim, Chambers's Charles, or, the "Secrets of New York", Three Years in a Jail-Tree, The Waterhouse, Parliament, or, the Satanic License, Eliza Benson, or, the Old Still-house, in the Hollow, The First Glass of Wine, or, Charles Morton, The Sting of

the Adder, An Account of the Marvelous Doings of Prince Alcohol, It Will Never Injure Me, Benjamin, the Temperance Boy, Confessions of a Restored Inebriate. Dates do little good here, because temperance novelists failed to profit from past performances, but kept on in the same old patterns. Many of these books were printed before the Civil War, and reprinted after that war, and sold as well, if not better. The same shift in public taste that killed melodrama spelled the doom of temperance fiction -- slain by their own absurdities. Nobody knows exactly how many temperance novels were written, for many of them were issued by casual publishers, or privately printed. Such as we do have have been saved from the ash-can by mere luck. A large number of temperance novels in the C.L.A. Library were thrown out in the summer of 1940, they should have been discarded years earlier.

The Reverend Dr. P~~h~~arcellus Church's statement of pious perversion of the novel will stand for any and all of these books:

"Those who brand every book of the kind as a NOVEL, in an offensive sense, are at war with the constitution of our nature. . . . Instead of carping against light literature, it were better to charge it with truth and influences purifying, profound, and enduring, and send it abroad as a mission of love to mankind." 48

But the flood of temperance novels had little truth in them, had in-different influences which were hardly purifying; none of them were profound, none of them were enduring. They were sent abroad as missions of love to mankind, perhaps, but the total disregard of the primary responsibilities of the author to his readers that characterized every one of them made them bad fiction, and bad propaganda, bad because of their excesses, which become boresome.

Temperance fiction fails as effective purpose fiction because:

48 Mapleton, (Boston, 1853) p. iii

- 1) No good authors were interested in it when their talents were at their peak.
- 2) Those who did write them had no sense of humor, and paid little or no attention to selection and proportion.
- 3) Temperance, or the lack of it, is a personal problem that cannot be settled by legislation or literature.
- 4) The authors of temperance fiction used such stock, yet out-of-the-ordinary characters that the reader gets no sense of identification with them, a feeling essential to effective purpose fiction.

These anti-rum awfuls did much to dull the tastes of the reading public for more solid and less sensational fiction. Their sole good seems to have been in driving the Richardsonian seduction theme into oblivion. While these authors may have had the highest motives, their novels were as pernicious as any form of fiction, and more so, since they took the excesses of the sentimental and Gothic tale and magnified them, all in the sweet name of Truth & Piety. ⁴⁹

49

Many authors used temperance material in their books, but did not key it enough to warrant their inclusion. Of this class is William Dean Howells' A Modern Instance (1882), which has Bartley Hubbard, a mean-spirited fellow with no more moral nature than a baseball, addicted to drink; but this is an instance of the idea set forth by Holmes in the opening quotation of this section -- a drunkard who was morally rotten before he became a drunkard, and not vice-versa. Howells was too good a craftsman to have any truck with temperance reform, and when he did write purpose novels, he wrote them as a novelist, not a preacher.

The book that is probably as effective an indictment of intemperance as any ever written, is the semi-autobiographical John Barleycorn of Jack London. But London writes from a personal viewpoint, and makes no attempt to try any reformation, and hence the book is not a temperance novel in the sense used here.

- 1) No good authors were included in it when their talents were at their peak.
- 2) Those who did write them had no sense of humor, and paid little or no attention to selection and presentation.
- 3) Temperance, or the lack of it, is a personal problem that cannot be settled by legislation or literature.
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PART IV

The Exception that Proves the Rule—

White-Jacket (1850)

The first really successful novel that had a pronounced influence in correcting a bad abuse was Herman Melville's autobiographical work, White-Jacket: The World in a Man-of-War (1850), a book that has been credited by Rear Admiral Franklin with having more influence than anything else in abolishing corporal punishment in the Navy. Published two years before Mrs. Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852), this makes Melville the first, and one of the most effective writers of purpose fiction; yet White-Jacket was not written primarily to expose flogging, for its author was not a reformer before he was a novelist. It is hard to imagine the author of Moby Dick indulging in undisguised preaching.

The author's preface, dated New York, March, 1850, gives Melville's purpose in writing the book:

"In the year 1843 I shipped as 'Ordinary seaman' on board of a United States frigate, then lying in a harbor of the Pacific. After remaining in this frigate for more than a year, I was discharged from the service upon the vessel's arrival home. My man-of-war experiences and observations are incorporated in the present volume."⁵⁰

There is nothing here of apology or moral purpose or justification. Melville used the frigate as an allegory for the world, and while drawing a complete picture of the various strata of the fighting ship, he aligned his picture in such a way that it represents all mankind. Possessor of a first-rate mind, he dissected the life he saw there in an almost clinical manner. When what he saw was good, he said so, and when it was bad, he made no comprom-

⁵⁰ Romances of Herman Melville (Tudor Publishing Co, N.Y., 1931) p.1105

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⁵⁰ Preface of Herman Melville (Tubor Publishing Co., N.Y., 1931), p. 110B.

ises with the unflattering truth.

The chief evil that he denounces is excessive punishments, more especially flogging. He makes floggings play an important part in the lives of several of his characters, and follows these passages with reasons for his abhorrence of the out-moded practice. He introduces this material in a legitimate manner, so that it fits in with the rest of the narrative, and is properly proportioned to the other parts of the book. His conclusions grow out of his story, and it is obvious that he did not introduce the flogging-scenes just to insert this propaganda. Unlike the other reformers of that and later days, his sense of proportion kept him from overstressing his purpose. While he is deadly sincere in his opposition to flogging, and presents long arguments, backed up by statistics and history, he does not try to shove his ideas down the reader's throat. He presents his stand so that its moral truth is unassailable. While he crusades for his ideas, he does not break faith with his reader by serving up the story as an excuse for the plaint. Melville's artistic skill, aided by his trenchant marshalling of the facts of his indictment enabled him to do more with some six chapters out of a book of ninety-three chapters than the majority of men could do with a whole book to whip the evil.

A copy of White-Jacket was placed on the desk of every member of Congress, and as a result of the impact of Melville's indictment, and the report of an investigating committee, the government abolished flogging and corporal punishment in the armed forces.

White-Jacket stands alone in purpose-novels. The most successful purpose-achieving novel, it was not primarily a purpose novel; but it illustrates the necessary qualities of top-notch purpose fiction. It was

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The chief evil that he denounces is excessive punishment, more especially flogging. He makes flogging play an important part in the lives of several of his characters, and follows these persons with reasons for his abhorrence of the out-moded practice. He introduces this material in a fairly tame manner, so that it fits in with the rest of the narrative, and is properly proportioned to the other parts of the book. His conclusions grow out of his story, and it is obvious that he did not introduce the flogging scenes just to insert this propaganda. Unlike the other reformers of that age and later days, his sense of proportion kept him from oversteering his purpose. While he is decidedly sincere in his opposition to flogging, and presents long arguments, backed up by statistics and history, he does not try to shove his ideas down the reader's throat. He presents his stand so that its moral truth is unmistakable. While he argues for his ideas, he does not break faith with his reader by serving up the story as an excuse for the point. Melville's witless skill, aided by his tremendous marshalling of the facts of his indictment enabled him to do more with some six chapters out of a book of ninety-three chapters than the majority of men could do with whole books to whip the evil.

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written by a man who knew his work, and put that work first. Melville knew the evil from first-hand experience, and carefully reasoned out his attack, and made sure that it was not over-emotionalized. Melville placed his attack subservient to his narrative, both in point of size and in its relationship to the characters. The characters live of themselves, not as puppets for propaganda. This supremacy of the characters over the purpose, far from harming the impact of the preaching, increased its wallop. Old Ushant and White Jacket make the propaganda live, and not vice-versa. Once Melville proved his point, he had sense enough to drop it, and not bring it in with but slight changes again and again.

Here then we find all of the factors that make up effective purpose literature combined in one book. An author intending to invade this sphere of writing would do well to make a careful analysis of White Jacket .

The factor that had won the war for the North -- our great industrial system -- had grown enormously, transforming many aspects of American life. The factories needed laborers, and got them from the farms and from the increased immigration. The railroads had grown larger, and spanned greater stretches of the country. The East became primarily a manufacturing section, a collection of large cities, cities which dominated the hinterlands politically, socially, and financially. The South was impotent, the West had not yet become sufficiently organized to assert itself. The end of the war saw many of the soldiers going West to take up farming; the urge for better land enticed some New England farmers away from their rocky hills, thus further decreasing the strength of agriculture in the East. And profit-seeking and political corruption were in the saddle.

51. Cited from The Golden Era by S. W. Cresson in his A Short History of American Literature (N.Y. 1945) p. 172

written by a man who knew his work, and put that work there. Heville knew the evil from first-hand experience, and carefully recorded out his attack, and made sure that it was not over-sensitized. Heville placed his attack subsequent to his narrative, both in point of time and in the relationship to the characters. The characters live of themselves, not as puppets for propaganda. This exposure of the characters over the purpose, far from harming the impact of the preaching, increased its value. The intent and White Jacket made the propaganda live, and not vice-versa. Once Heville proved his point, he had sense enough to drop it, and not bring it in with but slight changes again and again.

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PART V

From the Golden Day to the Gilded Age

Lewis Mumford's statement condenses the countless changes wrought by the impact of the Civil War upon the country:

"The Civil War cut a white gash through the history of the country; it dramatized in a stroke the changes that had begun to take place during the preceding twenty or thirty years. On one side lay the Golden Day, the period of an Elizabethan daring on the sea, of a well-balanced adjustment of farm and factory in the East . . . an age in which the American mind had flourished and had begun to find itself. When the curtain rose on the post-bellum scene, this old America was for all practical purposes demolished; industrialism had entered overnight, had transformed the practices of agriculture, had encouraged a mad exploitation of mineral oil, natural gas, and coal, and had made the unscrupulous master of finance, fat with war-profits, the central figure of the situation."⁵¹

The factor that had won the war for the North -- her great industrial system -- had grown enormously, transforming many aspects of American life. The factories needed laborers, and got them from the farms and from the increased immigration. The railroads had grown larger, and spanned greater stretches of the country. The East became primarily a manufacturing section, a collection of large cities, cities which dominated the hinterlands politically, socially, and financially. The South was impotent, the West had not yet become sufficiently organized to assert itself. The end of the War saw many of the soldiers going West to take up farming; the urge for better land enticed many New England farmers away from their rocky hills, thus further decreasing the strength of Agriculture in the East. Mad profit-seeking and political corruption were in the saddle.

⁵¹ Cited from The Golden Day by G. H. Orians in his A Short History of the American Literature (N.Y. 1940) p. 173

PART V

From the Golden Day to the United Age

James Mumford's statement compares the country changes wrought by

the impact of the Civil War upon the country; "The Civil War cut a white slash through the history of the country; it dramatized in a stroke the changes that had begun to take place during the preceding twenty or thirty years. On one side lay the Golden Day, the period of an American dream, on the other, at a well-balanced adjustment of farm and factory in the East . . . an age in which the American mind had flowered and had begun to find itself. When the curtain rose on the post-bellum scene, this old America was for all practical purposes demolished; industrialism had entered overnight, and transformed the practices of agriculture, had encouraged a mad exploitation of mineral oil, natural gas, and coal, and had made the unscrupulous master of finance, fat with war-profits, the central figure of the situation."²¹

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²¹ Cited from The Golden Day by G. E. Collins in his A Short History of American Literature (N.Y., 1940), p. 173.

All of these movements were reflected in the novels of the next thirty-five years. These evils never had the popular excitement behind them that had been able to insure the success of the abolition and early temperance fiction, but they were championed by abler writers, and the calibre of these novels of protest and exposure, was, on the whole, far better than the purpose novels of ante-bellum days. As the social conscience of the general public became more and more blunted, the number of abuses multiplied, but the public showed a disinclination to remedy them until their stench became overpowering, or some talented author could over-stress the problem and force a partial clean-up.

The Reconstruction governments in the South, the Tweed and other rings, and the lack of political morality that culminated in the Grant régime, and the open capture of government by large-scale business all made up a political mess that cried for reform. Big business went on its sweet way, and let nothing stand in its path. They swindled their employees by every possible method, they had a callous disregard for human rights if those rights stood between them and a profit. They made the government their agent, and passed laws to line their pockets. The rise of the steel, oil, meat, and railroad trusts enabled their owners to do as they pleased to their employees, the farmer, and the general public. The American people being what they are, they let such practices go on practically unhindered until they were directly affected, or learned of the evil in such a way that they seemed to be directly affected. This awakening is the aim of all good purpose fiction. Unfortunately, only a few of the many purpose novels have this power to make the reader identify himself with those of whom he reads.

Mrs. Rebecca Harding Davis, mother of the correspondent and novelist

Richard Harding Davis, was a novelist in her own right, and in her Margaret Howth (1862) she speaks out against the conditions in the mills and in the slums they spawn. The book is uneven, its preachings are a bit forced, but it is obviously sincere and displays a far greater degree of novelistic skill than other women writers of that day could demonstrate. Mrs. Davis knew her material from close observation and her work thus gained an impact that previous novels of protest had in the main lacked. She took up the problem of the "passer" in Waiting for the Verdict (1867), a problem that she airs a full twenty-seven years before Mark Twain used it in his Pudd'-nhead Wilson (1894). Her hero, Dr. Broderip, is a half-breed, who has the opportunity to keep the world from learning of his negro blood by killing his blacker brother during an operation, an opportunity which he refuses, and turns to his own race. Her treatment is a refreshing relief from the conventional presentation of the negro in the pre-war novels. But she reaches her best in John Andross (1874) where her pen pricks at the malodorous mess of the Whisky Ring, and political lobbyings by coal and iron interests in the Pennsylvania legislature. Houston Laird, the financier, is not an overly attractive figure - a man that tries to buy everything he wanted, or that stood in his way, but he is typical of the men that made the trusts the powers that they became. All of Mrs. Davis' novels that are mentioned here, while they dealt with various topical abuses, were not strictly purpose novels, but stand on that middle ground between purpose and regular fiction, having some of the elements of each class, but not enough of either one to insure any measure of lasting reputation. There are a great number of these semi-purpose novels in the development of American fiction, novels that are of some importance in showing in what ways the literary and social winds were blowing at that time, or as

Richard Wright, was a novelist in her own right, and in her novels (1957) she speaks out against the conditions in the white and in the black. The book is uneven, the passages are a bit forced, but it is obviously sincere and displays a far greater degree of realistic skill than other women writers of that day could demonstrate. Mrs. Davis knew her writer's from close observation and her work thus gained an impact that previous novels of protest had in the male lacked. She took up the problem of the "passer" in Waiting for the Land (1957), a problem that she also took twenty-seven years before first Davis used it in Black Boy. Richard Wright (1954), her hero, Dr. Stedman, is a half-breed, who has the opportunity to keep the world from feeling of his negro blood by killing his blacker brother during an operation, an opportunity which he refuses, and turns to his own race. His treatment is a well-earned relief from the conventional presentation of the hero in the grey novels. But she reached her best in John Anderson (1957), where she can pick at the malodorous mass of the white king, and political lobbying, coal and iron interests in the Pennsylvania legislature. Houston Fair, the Tennessee, is not an overly attractive figure - a fact that tends to pay everything he wanted, or that stood in his way, but he is typical of the men that make the trusts the power that they possess. All of Mrs. Davis' novels that are mentioned here, while they deal with various topical subjects, were not strictly purpose novels, but stand on that middle ground between purpose and regular fiction, having some of the elements of each class, but not enough of either one to insure any measure of lasting reputation. There are a great number of these semi-purpose novels in the development of American fiction, novels that are of some importance in showing the state of the literary and social winds were blowing at that time, or was

indications of the development of writers not primarily propagandists. It becomes obvious that the line between just plain novels and purpose or didactic novels is not a broad, well-defined border, but a line that wavers over considerable latitude, depending on the date and the nature of the problem or purpose.

A disciple of Mrs. Davis, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps Ward, wrote a pair of books that continued the portrayal of the seamy life in a New England mill town. In 1870 she wrote Hedged In, describing the living conditions on Thicket Street, South Atlas, a typical mill town of the 'forties. The depressing realism of the tale on increased its power, and showed that some of the scenes from the pro-slavery novels were not too far out of the way in their descriptions of the horrors of Northern wage-slavery. The Silent Partner (1871) showed the rank exploitation of New England mill-workers. The mill owners are perfect swine, interested only in profits, but she did not paint them as altogether bad in all respects. The lack of any relieving touches of humor made the book good realism, but it never had the great popularity essential to the effective purpose novel.

A man whose work deserved a far better reputation was John William DeForest, a man that was too advanced for his own day, and when the taste of the public caught up to his style, his work was elbowed out by more current works. His Honest John Vane (1875) was a vitriolic attack on the venality of the Congress during the Grant administration, especially the infamous Crédit Mobilier. He did the railroad scheme one better, and has as the origin of his graft and corruption the Backers of a Subfluvial Tunnel Road - a road which was "meant to run through our country from north to south, under the Mississippi River, uniting Lake Superior with the Gulf of Mexico"⁵²

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and "built at the expense of the Treasury for the benefit of directors and officers and boss stockholders"⁵³, a scheme not too much at variance with the methods used to finance the Crédit Mobilier. Vane was a member of the House, honest to start with, but corrupted by debt and the constant hammering of the lobbyists, male and female. DeForest had served in the Army and did Reconstruction work for several years, and knew the reeking mess that was the Republican machine, which had no opposition to hinder its plunderings.

DeForest had previously sniped at political depravity in a short humorous work entitled An Inspired Lobbyist (1872) which chronicled the twistings of one Ananias Pullwool, who was "the most successful and famous lobbyist in Washington, and the most sought after by the most rascally and desperate claimants of unlawful millions."⁵⁴ He used the theme of the grafting lobbyist again in Playing the Mischief (1875) which made a woman the leading lobbyist. Mrs. Josephine Murray, a widow and young, comes to Grant's Washington to make good a claim for damages done during the War of 1812 to a barn that had belonged to her husband's father. Thanks to her charms and liberal palm-greasing, she is finally awarded damages amounting to \$100,000. The book is a complement to Honest John Vane, and between them, they show how the Treasury was looted by big and little swindles hatched by money-mad politicians whose chief claim to power was the fact that their party had won the war. DeForest made no attempt to gild over corruption that he saw, and his books still make good reading. He was never popular, and the reason for this unpopularity, as given by Howells, is an interesting commentary on the petticoat tyranny that still swayed American fiction of that

⁵³ Ibid, p. 94

⁵⁴ An Inspired Lobbyist (cited in Stories by American Authors, p 138)

and "half of the expense of the Treasury for the benefit of directors and officers and poor stockholders,"⁵³ a scheme not too much at variance with the methods used to finance the Credit Mobilier. Vane was a member of the House, honest to start with, but corrupted by debt and the constant harrasing of the lobbyists, male and female. DeForest had served in the Army and did Reconstruction work for several years, and knew the ranking men that was the Republican machine, which had no occasion to hinder the plunderings. DeForest had previously signed at political assembly in a short humorous work entitled An Imagined Lobbyist (1872) which contained the sketches of one Amosius Bulwer, who was "the most successful and famous lobbyist in Washington, and the most sought after by the most rapaciously and desperate elements of unscrupulous millions."⁵⁴ He used the theme of the grifting lobbyist again in Playing the Musical (1872) which made a woman the leading lobbyist. Mrs. Josephine Murray, a widow and young, comes to Grant's Washington to make good a claim for damages done during the war of 1861 to a barn that had belonged to her husband's father. Thanks to her charm and liberal gift-giving, she is finally awarded damages amounting to \$100,000. The book is a compliment to Honest John Vane, and between them they show how the Treasury was looted by big and little swindlers hatched by money-and politicians whose chief claim to power was the fact that their party had won the war. DeForest made no attempt to fill over destruction that he saw, and his books still make good reading. He was never popular, and the reason for this unpopularity, as given by Howell, is an interesting commentary on the petticeat tyranny that still swayed American fiction of that

⁵³ Ibid., p. 94

⁵⁴ An Imagined Lobbyist (cited in Stories by American Authors, p. 152)

day:

"A certain scornful bluntness in dealing with the disguises in which women's natures reveal themselves is perhaps at the root of that dislike which most women have felt for his fiction, and which in a nation of women readers has prevented it from ever winning a merited popularityFiner, not stronger workmen succeeded him, and a delicate realism, more responsive to the claims and appeals of the feminine over-soul, replaced his inexorable veracity." 55

This opinion is an indication of the consolidation of what Thomas Beer called "The Titaness", the Great American Gorgon, the typical American woman, whose petrifying disapproval, and increasing vocalness became the horror of American authors. A few hardy souls broke away through the Civil War, but the majority were quickly brought back under her sway as soon as they returned home. This fear of the Gorgon's disfavor resulted in more or less typed characters in the fiction of the period between 1865 and 1911. The only characters that showed any signs of the stuff of real life were those who were not ladies and gentlemen. The characters of the Gothic novel were no more stereotyped than these straw-men and women. The strength of the ladies and the tacit support of the men they dominated was strong enough to choke back the trend towards realism engendered by the War for nearly a quarter of a century. There were set up unwritten rules that were generally adhered to; any infractions were punished by undeclared boycott. American fiction was swayed by a new didacticism, an adherence to the way of life of the Gorgon, which glorified her world as the best of all possible worlds. Her natural self-righteousness was increased by this nearly universal adulation, and any attempt to crack through it became a difficult job, a job that required more than average ability and courage, since the Gorgon and her adherents took these writings as a challenge to the natural

"A certain scientific blindness in dealing with the diseases in which women's natures reveal themselves is perhaps at the root of that dislike which most women have felt for his fiction, and which in a nation of women readers has prevented it from ever winning a merited popularity.... Finer, not stronger women succeeded him, and a delicate realism, more responsive to the claims and appeals of the feminine over-soul, replaced his inexorable verities." 25

This opinion is an indication of the consolidation of what Thomas Beer called "The Woman's Era," the Great American Gorgon, the typical American woman, whose petrifying disapproval, and increasing vocalness became the horror of American authors. A few hardy souls broke away through the Evil War, but the majority were quickly brought back under her sway as soon as they returned home. This fear of the Gorgon's disapproval resulted in more or less typed characters in the fiction of the period between 1865 and 1915. The only characters that showed any signs of real life were those who were not ladies and gentlemen. The characters of the Gothic novel were no more stereotyped than these strong-men and women. The strength of the ladies and the tacit support of the men they dominated was strong enough to choke back the trend towards realism suggested by the War for nearly a quarter of a century. There were set up unwritten rules that were generally adhered to; any infractions were punished by undelivered hysteresis. American fiction was swept by a new idealism, an adherence to the way of life of the Gorgon, which glorified her world as the best of all possible worlds. Her natural self-righteousness was increased by this nearly universal adulation, and any attempt to crack through it became a difficult job, a job that required more than average ability and courage, since the Gorgon and her adherents took these writings as a challenge to the natural

order of things, and treated them accordingly. It was Richardsonian morality raised a few social levels and made a minor religion.

In between DeForest's three attacks on corruption in Washington came The Gilded Age (1873) by Charles Dudley Warner and Mark Twain, a book that had the stuff of greatness in it, but didn't quite come off, due to the more conventional elements of the book, which were largely the work of Warner. What strength and power it possessed was due to Twain's half, especially his immortal Colonel Beriah Sellers, an American Micawber. The notions of the ever-optimistic blowhard are shown in this ringing declaration:

"The whole country is opening up; all we want is capital to develop it. Slap down the rails and bring the land into the market. The richest land on God Almighty's footstool is lying right out there. If I had my capital free I could plant it for millions."⁵⁶

and

"The country is getting along very well, but our public men are too timid. What we want is more money. I've told Boutwell so. Talk of basing the currency on gold; you might as well base it on pork. Gold is only one product. Base it on everything! You've got to do something for the West. How am I to move my crops? We must have improvements. Grant's got the idea. We want a canal from the James River to the Mississippi. Government ought to build it."⁵⁷

Senator Dillworthy, a symbol of legislative corruption, was modeled on a Kansas Senator. Dillworthy fathers several worthless, but pocket-lining schemes -- a pork-barrel navigation project for the Columbia River, which is euphemised as the Goose Run. New York's Tweed Ring is shown, and we meet a William M. Weed, who is efficiently looting the city of millions, and then rewarded for his civic virtue by election to the legislature. The Crédit Mobilier comes in as a Salt Lick Extension which the government is backing to the tune of "forty thousand dollars a mile over the prairie, with extra for hardpan -- and it'll be pretty much all hardpan, I can tell you;

⁵⁶ The Gilded Age (N.Y., n.d.) Author's National Edition (1873) 2 vols.

⁵⁷ Ibid, vol. II, p. 141

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ever-optimistic pioneer are shown in this ringing declaration: "The whole country is opening up; all we want is capital to develop it. Blast down the rails and bring the land into the market. The richest land on God Almighty's footstool is lying right out there. If I had my capital I could plant it for millions."²⁸

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backing in the form of "forty thousand dollars a mile over the prairie, with extra for bargains -- and it'll be worth much all right, I can tell you!"

²⁸ The Golden Age (N.Y., n.d.). Author's National Edition (1878) 2 vols.

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besides every alternate section of land on this line. There's millions in the job." 58

With all the possibilities for success, the chief merit of the book is its worth as a social study; it just doesn't hang together, and were it not for the irrepressible Col. Sellers, the book would be quite dull. When the book was dramatized, the part of the Colonel proved to be a natural, and an actor's delight. As humor the book was good, as purpose fiction it was innocuous. The dichotomy of authorship was too much of a handicap to overcome; the book was an unnatural union, and its issue was sterile.

The political gangrene of Washington was aired again in Figs and Thistles (1879) by Albion W. Tourgée, which had as a main theme a Trans-Continental Railway Bill, and in Henry Adam's Democracy (1880). Democracy is a bitter indictment of Washington morals, or the lack of them, but despite its urbanity and adherence to conventionality, it failed to be at all effective, because Adams did not hit at the basic causes of that moral bankruptcy, merely giving its effects. His presentation of the same ideas in the Education was far more effective.

The novels that followed the Civil War were more or less innocuous, and the few purpose novels that were written were pretty weak stuff, mostly rehashing of temperance material. Then, in the eighties came two novels that approached the level of Uncle Tom's Cabin and White-Jacket : Ramona (1884) and Looking Backward, 2000-1887 (1887).

58 Ibid vol. I, p. 149

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PART VI

The Middle Years 1880- 1917

Ramona is an excellent example of the effectiveness of the purpose novel when it is properly handled. Mrs. Jackson had learned of the abuses of the Indians and gathered together a mass of evidence which she worked up into A Century of Dishonor (1881). Despite the undeniable evidence of the government's neglect and dishonesty towards its wards, the book had very poor sales. Determined to drive home her case, Mrs. Jackson reworked her material into a novel - Ramona - tailoring it to fit the altered requirements of fiction, a lesson that ninety-nine purpose-fiction authors out of a hundred ignore. Ramona shows what can result when an intelligent author who knows her material, and does everything possible in order to make her novel convincing. Mrs. Jackson injects life into her evidence, for most of the instances were based on facts. Her characters live of themselves, and by making the reader identify himself with them, she was able to appeal to the reader's sympathy with far greater ease than the writers of the alternating statistics and sermons of earlier and less successful writers. Ramona is probably the best piece of purpose fiction that has been written by an American, all factors considered. The book went into over one hundred and thirty-five reprintings. In 1935 Little, Brown and Co. issued a gift edition of 50,000 copies and had no trouble in moving it.

But the conditions which brought about the writing of Ramona are not likely to happen altogether again. Mrs. Jackson had been writing good fiction and poetry for more than fifteen years prior to the writing of her master-

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But the conditions which brought about the writing of Ramona are not likely to happen altogether again. Mrs. Jackson had been writing good fiction and poetry for more than fifteen years prior to the writing of her master-

piece. She had reached her stylistic peak with this novel. While other novelists of considerable talent have tried their hands at writing purpose fiction they had not yet reached, or had passed their stylistic peak. Mrs. Stowe and Melville and Whitman are the outstanding examples of this. Added to her stylistic ability, Mrs. Jackson knew from bitter experience that plain statistics were not enough, and turned away from disguised statistics and preachments, and attacked the problem from the viewpoint of the novelist, and subdued her propaganda to her sense of literary craftsmanship. She set out to write a piece of fiction that would win its readers purely on its merit as fiction, a piece of fiction that would call public attention to governmental abuse of the Indian. She succeeded in her aims. So well did she cloak her protests against the order of things that her book has met with the same reception as another exposé of then current evils --Gulliver's Travels-- and became a favorite children's story. Yet the fact that the book appeals to minds who are oblivious of the purpose of the book is not detrimental. As is the case with Swift's work, Ramona's more serious side is perfectly plain to a mature mind. Indeed, this appeal to young minds on the merits of the story alone is in the book's favor. It is almost axiomatic that any first-rate purpose fiction should be capable of being read for itself, and not for its message. Those which fail to measure up to this requirement are usually either poor fiction, or a mass of dull statistics, or, in most cases, both. The fact that at least five successful movies have been made from Ramona shows that it is good entertainment, if nothing else.

The other outstanding purpose novel of that decade, Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward, 2000-1887 is the best of the American Utopian novels, and the most influential. In the Nationalist for May, 1889, Bellamy wrote an

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"In undertaking to write Looking Backward, I had, at the outset, no idea of attempting a serious contribution to the movement of social reform. The idea was a mere literary fantasy, a fairy tale of social felicity. There was no thought of contriving a house which practical men might live in, but merely of building in mid-air, far out of reach of the sordid and material world of the present, a cloud-palace for an ideal humanity." 59

It seems harsh to doubt the word of a man unable to defend himself, but there is a certain amount of evidence to show that these are not quite the facts of the case. The book is primarily a presentation of Bellamy's pseudo-economic ideas, and its appeal as a novel is not up to its appeal as a facile presentation of an utopian Boston. While it may be true that Bellamy did not intend it as the "serious contribution to social reform" that many people were to make of it, he certainly didn't set out just to write an interesting novel. His previous novel, The Duke of Stockbridge (1879) dealt with the economic maladies that had caused Shay's Rebellion. The man had a very facile and able brain, and was able to present quite unsound ideas in an almost irresistible manner. Looking Backward, thanks to the very magnitude of its subject, contains huge chunks of sociological and economic discussion that are, by their natures, readably indigestible. A great many of the startling changes that have taken place are merely described by Julian West's host, Dr. Leete, and thus lose much of their effectiveness. There is little or no appeal to the image-making faculties of the mind, and that little is extremely nebulous. The burden of carrying reader-interest is left almost entirely to the impact of Bellamy's ideas and theories. That these ideas are of such a nature as to hold attention for nearly three hundred and fifty pages is a tribute to Bellamy's power. The book was a popular success, selling 350,000 copies in two years, and was the center of more public interest and discussion than any book since Uncle Tom's Cabin.

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22 The Nation, May, 1884, p. 1

It spawned a number of books pro and con, sold hundreds of thousands of copies, and a political party -- the Nationalists -- was founded upon the ideas he presented.

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Looking Backward is the only instance of American purpose fiction that became a great popular success purely on the appeal of its purpose. Bellamy had no statistics to deliver, merely theories. He makes these theories appealing by drawing up indictments ²gainst then current wrongs and contrasting them with the solutions he had worked out for his utopian Boston, and through this contrast, he succeeds in driving home his points far more graphically than if he had given just the theories themselves. He is the only author who has been able to carry off such a scheme with any degree of success, and even Bellamy couldn't repeat his success, for his next book, Equality (1897) which was a sequel to his earlier work, had even less of a novelistic gloss. He attempted to answer the various criticisms of Looking Backward and buttressed these ideas which were unchallenged, and as a result, the weight and mass of detail and theory quite swamped the fictional aspects of the book. It contained a brilliant little parable that shows Bellamy at his best -- "The Parable of the Water-Tank" ⁶⁰ showing his ability to make his theories graphic. If he was primarily interested in his purpose in Looking Backward, Bellamy is even more so in Equality, and thanks to his insistence upon driving these purposes across, the book becomes more or less of a tract.

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Equality (N.Y. 1897) p. 195

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we see a polished literary craftsman who turned out competent purpose novels, novels which were frankly inspired by a reading of Bellamy.⁶¹ Howells' habitual urbanity manifests itself all through these novels, and while he recommends complete communism, with no money, and equal work and wealth, he doesn't become violent about it. His polished, calm attack shows the novelist in him triumphant over the reformer. Howells' whole output of novels reflects the experience of his early magazine work. The Atlantic, Harpers, and Century were frankly designed to appeal to educated men and women, and it was the women that determined the tone of the material appearing in them. Howells, no fool, recognized the requirements of his reading public, and tailored his work accordingly. Personally favoring the more realistic presentation, and fully aware of the European realists, he modified realism to suit a feminine audience, and did all he could to make his work border on realism and yet keep within the bounds set by the nature of his audience. That he knew what the ideal should have been is seen in his remarks on DeForest. His purpose novels are a perfect illustration of his literary position. They show the first of the three steps that make up effective purpose fiction:

- 1) An awareness of the problem, and a working information of it.
- 2) The ability to work this material into an appeal that will make the reader conscious of that problem.
- 3) The fictional craft that will give the reader a sense of identity with the characters, and arouse them to do something to rectify the problem.

Howells did not have that extra drive needed to insure this final step.

Bellamy did not have it either, but got results without it, but he was an exception.

Howells had an element of purpose in seven of his novels: Annie Kilburn (1888), A Hazard of New Fortunes (1889), The Quality of Mercy (1892) The World of Chance (1893), ^A Traveller from Altruria (1894) Through the

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A Traveller from Altruria (N.Y. 1894) pp. 212-213

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Eye of the Needle (1907), and New Leaf Mills (1913). It is with ^A ~~The~~ Traveller from Altruria, and Through the Eye of the Needle that he makes this purpose his main theme. In both of them he uses the same device with Bellamy employed -- contrasting the then current society with a Utopia. In the first book, Mr. Homos, the Traveller, comes to this country, and in the sequel, he marries a New York society woman, and takes her back with him to Altruria. Both books were keen satire, but his attacks are not vicious enough to really bite in, and these books are deservedly listed among his less important works, Mildness is not effective in the purpose novel.

A book that in a way forms a companion-piece to Adam's Democracy is John Hay's The Breadwinners (1882). Both books were written when the two men were in close contact, and opinion about them differs sharply. Fred Lewis Pattee claims that the Adams book is bad, and the Hay book far better; while Arthur Hobson Quinn takes exactly the opposite stand. It is sufficient to say that it is just as well that the reputations of the authors does not have to rest on them. As Adams had given the aristocratic reaction to the political situation, Hay applied that viewpoint to the troubles with the organized labor of that day. He based the book on the railway strike at Cleveland, called "Buffland". Hay knew next to nothing about labor problems. His sole motive seems to have been the defense of property against the "dangerous classes", and his immediate theme was satire of the labor unions. He tells of a professional agitator and organizer, Ananias Offett, a thorough swine, who victimized poor ignorant workers like Sleeney. There was far less excuse for The Breadwinners than there was for Democracy. It is significant that neither man would sign his name to his work.

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and the Populist Movement, especially the Grange and the Farmer's Alliance. It shows how the shortsightedness of the Republican party harmed the development of the economic life of the Mid-West. Garland used the familiar theme of railroad influences upon legislatures in his A Member of the Third House (1892). Ten years later he came out with The Captain of the Gray Horse Troop (1902) which is no better than its title, being a rambling yarn about a stalwart frontiersman. The hero decides to assume the rôle of protector of the Sioux against the white man who would take the lands that belonged to the noble savages. The book was far below Garland's usual level, and compared to Ramona, pitiful. Garland's glorification of the West, a theme he was less at home with than the Mid-West of his own experience, was exploited again in Cavanagh, Forest Ranger (1910). Again the blast is against exploitation, this time by cattle and sheepmen, who were encroaching on the public domain. The book was an attempt to capitalize on the interest aroused in conservation by Theodore Roosevelt. None of these purpose novels of Garland's are very good, either as purpose or straight fiction, and do not show him at his best. They fail to convey the bitter reality of his Middle Border novels, and are forced.

Jack London's torrential output of books included several out-and-out purpose novels. Unlike most writers who feigned sympathy with the underdog, London knew of their hard life from first-hand experience. He went to London for two months and lived in the slums to get material to write The People of the Abyss (1903) which describes the great East End slums. London's reportorial talents outshone the purpose elements, for his characters are interesting but unconvincing. In The War of the Classes (1905) and Revolution (1910) he propagandizes for socialism, an "ism" that was far more potent then than today. London was a predecessor of Sinclair Lewis in predicting a Fascist seizure of power in this country, and his The Iron Heel came twenty-seven

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years before the Lewis book. He had a combination of plutocrats and mercenaries, aided by labor unions, take over the country by force in 1932. The rebelling forces are Socialists and members of the Iron Heel. The book heaped abuse on things as they were, but failed to make any substantial constructive suggestions for improving them. London's vitality makes the book interesting reading, but it is not at all convincing. It is, however, a far better book than It Can't Happen Here. Despite his obvious sincerity and acquaintance with sociological material, London could not bring off a first-class purpose novel, and his work along this line does not show him at his best.

In the novels of Winston Churchill we see just the opposite -- a man who made his reputation with romances, but did his best work in purpose fiction. He knew his New England politics at first hand, having served in the New Hampshire Legislature as representative of the town of Cornish, and was barely defeated for the governorship in 1908. While in politics, he fought against the very practices that he wrote against in Coniston (1906) and Mr. Crewe's Career (1908) --- political bosses, and large corporations that meddled in politics for their financial betterment. These two books are the best attacks on corrupt American politics that we have, but here again, the novelist in Churchill triumphed over the preacher. The man had the talent and the knowledge, but no writer has yet been able to overthrow the venality of politicians by his pen. It is a laudable purpose to try, but one that is practically certain of failure. The purpose advocated must be one that is capable of realization without a major shift in human nature. In both books Churchill has the omnipotent railroad seeking to either beat down or corrupt all that stood in its way. Coniston has something that is extremely rare in purpose fiction -- a hero that is a character, and not a puppet, a man that holds the sympathies of the reader -- Jethro Bass, the

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extremely rare in purpose fiction -- a hero that is a character, and not a
simplistic, a man that holds the sympathies of the reader -- John Ross, the

political boss. It is quite probable that if Bass had been a less compelling character and more of a vehicle for propaganda, the didactic aspects of the book might have been strengthened considerably. Churchill's treatment of Bass made the book outstanding as straight fiction, and subordinated the purpose elements.

Upton Sinclair is a writer whose talents run wholly to propaganda. His early literary work consisted in grinding out dime novels and similar pot-boilers for Street and Smith, and as a result of this work, he became so accustomed to the medium that all of his later propaganda novels read like dime novels. He makes propaganda and situation carry the whole load, and uses mere abstractions or caricatures for his characters. Sinclair has turned out a staggering number of novels, most of them in behalf of some ideas that he was interested at the time. Most of these tracts have only a topical interest, and have been forgotten, since it takes more than indignation to make a successful novel. But in one of these books, he wrote one of the top-ranking American purpose novels -- The Jungle (1906). The book was originally written for a Socialist paper, the Appeal To Reason, and was based on seven weeks spent by Sinclair in the Chicago stockyards in 1904. The material was excellent for a purpose novel, and was of a nature peculiarly suited to Sinclair's talents. The book was an immediate success, and was the best seller of the year, earning better than \$30,000 for its author. The Jungle raised such a public clamor that President Roosevelt was forced to appoint a committee to investigate the packing houses, and did much towards the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, and was instrumental in Sinclair's ^{refusing} an offer to become the head of a large packing house. As far as concrete, immediate results are concerned, The Jungle is unquestionably the outstanding piece of popular purpose fiction in American

political base. It is quite obvious that the book is a propaganda piece. The author's aim is to show that the American people are being misled by the government and the press. He argues that the government is using the press to create a false picture of the world and to keep the people in a state of ignorance. He also points out that the press is controlled by a few big interests and that it is therefore biased and dishonest. The book is written in a simple, direct style and is easy to read. It is a good example of propaganda literature and is well worth reading for anyone who is interested in the role of the press in American society.

The book is a collection of essays and is divided into two parts. The first part is entitled "The American People" and the second part is entitled "The American Press". In the first part, the author discusses the role of the government and the press in American society. He argues that the government is using the press to create a false picture of the world and to keep the people in a state of ignorance. He also points out that the press is controlled by a few big interests and that it is therefore biased and dishonest. In the second part, the author discusses the role of the press in American society. He argues that the press is controlled by a few big interests and that it is therefore biased and dishonest. He also points out that the press is using its power to create a false picture of the world and to keep the people in a state of ignorance.

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If Sinclair is judged solely by The Jungle, he becomes the outstanding writer of purpose fiction, but if all of his purpose novels are considered, his position drops sharply. The man has several failings, all of which are undesirable in good purpose fiction. His success in exposing the packers seems to have been caused by a combination of several factors; -- good material, an evil crying for reform, presentation at the best psychological time, and a quite melodramatic presentation. A far better novelist, Robert Herrick, had exposed stockyard methods and the meat trust a full year earlier in his Memoirs of an American Citizen (1905), but the more lurid exploitation of Sinclair was much more appealing to the public. His description of the various horrors of the packing plants was able to so dramatize the problem that public opinion could be aroused. Sinclair looked up the facts for his work, but he saw what he wanted to see, and studied only what he wanted to see. He magnifies some instances, and conveniently ignores others. The situation and material, not the characters, were the important things to Sinclair. The man's books are anachronistic, and hark back to the worse aspects of the abolitionist and temperance novels. He uses the chamber of horrors, the unreasoned and over-proportioned attack, the subordination of character and episodic presentation, and colors the result with an over-dose of sensationalism. The Jungle was a success, because all of his readers were consumers of meat from these packing houses; the factual matter struck home, the appeals for Socialism went unheeded. To see just how weak the man's work was when he left sure-fire material, compare his The Millennium (1929) with Looking Backward; Bellamy's book is better from every standpoint. Sinclair has turned out many novels that are both didactic and purposeful -- all thump

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Frank Norris's two purpose novels, The Octopus (1901) and The Pit (1903) are the work of a man who was fully aware of the nature of the good purpose novel. His essay on the subject is the best that has been written on the technique of writing effective purpose-fiction. The Octopus brings in the by-now traditional villain of the post-Civil War purpose novels -- the railroad. He went a step further, and based his railroad on a spawn of the Crédit Mobilier. The story concerns the fight between the wheat-farmers of the San Joaquin Valley of California and the "Pacific and South Western Railroad" which is Collis P. Huntington's Southern Railroad. The story is a fictional reworking of the "Mussel Slough Affair" of 1878. The railroad and its employees, whose evil propensities radiated from them like heat from a stove, are painted black as is possible as the Octopus that uses its strength and numerous arms to crush the helpless farmers. Yet the railroad is not the dominating theme of the book; it is the Wheat. The 'road is shown as but a temporary obstruction attempting to dam the flow of the Wheat to its destination. The book has characters that appeal to the interest of the reader, and while the case against the 'road is presented in as unadmirable a light as possible, so that it becomes a soulless fiend of incredible malignity, the scenes of life on the wheat-ranches and the vividness of the male characters keep The Octopus from being just another tract against railroad monopolies and railroad lobbying, etc. The assault on the Octopus was nothing new; Ambrose Bierce had been its chief literary opponent for the previous five years. In 1895 the bill that the railroad

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had introduced in Congress to enable it to refund the sixty million dollar debt of the Central Pacific which it had assumed at 2% yearly for fifty years was defeated, and the attack on the Octopus began. The Norris attack came just a bit late to be a material aid in the war on the beast. There is a didactic strain in Norris, and the moralist in him emerges again and again in these two books, but is counter-balanced by the artist in him. The Octopus shows clearly the combat of moralistic and artistic tendencies - the battle of the Octopus and the Wheat, and it is significant that the Wheat wins.

The Pit, which takes the Wheat another step on its journey, is of less interest than its predecessor, but sold better. The book is more integrated, but the Chicago Board of Trade is not as convincing a setting as the wheat-fields, and the evil here is an abstract one -- greed and lust for power.

The diplomat, Brand Whitlock, did some important work as a purpose novelist. His The Thirteenth District (1902) is a study of corrupt politics, and of the same calibre as those of Churchill. But it is his The Turn of the Balance (1907) that is of interest here. He tells of a minor criminal's experiences with the law, and draws from his own experiences as a lawyer. The book showed the antiquated condition of the typical large city prison, and Whitlock's descriptions of conditions there were convincing enough to make the book a potent factor in arousing public support to prison reform. Whitlock always kept his thesis under control, and centered his attention upon his characters. He did not become maudlin in order to further his ideas. The prison-material is kept within proportion with the rest of the novel, and thus it is all the more effective.

Probably the best novel of labor problems is Ernest Poole's story of a strike on the New York waterfront -- The Harbor (1915). While Poole is full of sympathy for the worker and the striker, he does not launch into the

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hysterical fulminations against Capital which characterize the fatuous proletarian novels of the next two decades. Poole speaks out against the wrongs done the workers, but he gives the Devil his due, a thing rare in this sort of literature. His work represents a golden mean between novels like The Breadwinners and the novelized doses of Marxism that showed a greater devotion to the Marxian dialectic than to sound thinking. Practically all writers of proletarian novels have been weak on economics and even weaker on fictional skill.

As was the case with The Octopus, Mr. Poole has something more to say than just protests, protests unaccompanied by any suggestions for bettering the problem. Billy, his hero, is a writer, who has lived near the harbor all his life, and intends to make it thematic in his writing -- showing the harbor as it was in the days of his father, when the glorification of American shipping was the ideal, as it was and is under Big Business, with efficiency at all costs as the ideal, and the harbor of tomorrow, when the working class has the controlling voice. Poole is long-headed enough to see that the nature of the problem would be different in each period, and does not make use of the class-war barrier that is all too typical in Marxian novels. While he clearly advocates the law of change, he does not insist that this change should be all at once, or immediately, but should be brought about by the intelligent co-operation of all involved. His philosophy is summed up in his statement, "To each age a harbor of its own." He is more generous in his treatment than those who have followed after him. The Harbor is an excellent pattern for novels of this type, a pattern that has been more or less ignored.

The Middle Years saw the purpose novel reach maturity and stand on its own without apology. The great purpose novels of the period proved that purpose fiction could be read for its own sake, and still be good fiction.

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PART VII

Anti-War Novels and their Effects

As soon as the war of 1914-18 was over, American authors began to write novels that were bitterly and disillusionally pacifistic; E. E. Cummings The Enormous Room (1922), John Dos Passos's Three Soldiers, Ernest Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms (1929) and many others. These obviously sincere books had good sales and made quite a stir, and typified the spirit of the decade. This flood of anti-war fiction was brought to the attention of the public in June of 1940 when Archibald MacLeish delivered a startling attack on the anti-war writers of his generation, including himself. In building up hatred of all war, said the poet, these writers had also built up a "moral unpreparedness" in the U.S. As a result, this country is totally disarmed and today is impotent to fight the evils of Fascism. The heart of his charge is contained in the following:

"... a large part of the responsibility for this state of mind in the generation now young belongs to the writers -- belongs specifically to the best and most sensitive and most persuasive writers -- of my generation who created in many minds the distrust not only of the tags, not only of the slogans, but of the words themselves. The war books of men like Barbusse, Latzke, Dos Passos, Ford Madox Ford, Ernest Hemingway, Erich Maria Remarque and Richard Aldington were not only books written against the hatefulness and cruelty and filthiness of war, They were also books filled with passionate contempt for the statements of conviction, or purpose and of belief in which the war of 1914-18 was fought. And they left behind in many minds the conclusion that not only the war and the war issues, but all issues, all moral issues, were false -- were fraudulent -- were intended to deceive."⁶²

62 Post-war Writers and Pre-War Minds New Republic, June 16, 1940, pp. 789-90

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His indictment made such a stir that LIFE wrote to many of the men mentioned, and asked for their opinion of the truth or falsity of the charge. These answers are of interest in revealing how the authors considered the impact of their own works. Hemingway replied:

" . . . I have no remorse neither literary nor political. . . Young men wrote of the first war to show truly the idiocies and murderous stupidities of the way it was conducted by the Allies and Italy. Other young men wrote books that showed the same thing about the German conduct of the war. All agreed on war's vileness and undesirability. If the Germans have learned how to fight a war and the Allies have not learned, MacLeish can hardly put the blame on our books. Or do his high sounding words blame us because we never advocated a Fascism to End Fascism?"⁶³

and Robert Sherwood (There Shall Be No Night, etc.) puts the case even better:

" Archibald MacLeish is right in his conclusions, but he exaggerates the influence exerted by writers of our generation. By far the most successful of anti-war books, All Quiet on the Western Front, failed to convert young Germans to pacificism. It seems that now the more articulate representatives of American youth are not so much anti-war as pro-revolution. They consider democracy a decadent mess -- and no wonder, in view of the environment in which they grew up: the jazz age of the early twenties, the hypocrisy and crime of prohibition the drunken-sailorism of the Coolidge boom and the wailing defeatism of depression. They now have a craving for a 'Strong Man' -- its doesn't much matter what color his shirt -- who will lead them into any sort of future that is radically different from the past. No more hymns to democracy will cure them of this craving; but maybe Hitler will."⁶⁴

E.E.Cummings was, as usual, sparse with his words:

" If you will stand in the supposed fountain at Washington Square, New York City, and look up at the so-called arch, you will find yourself reading 22 words by a man now living."⁶⁵ (The 22 words he refers to are; "let us raise a standard to which the wise and honest can repair. The event is in the hand of God" and were said by Washington at the Constitutional Convention in 1787)

Whatever the others left unsaid in refutation was cleaned up by Richard Aldington:

"I entirely disagree with Archibald MacLeish and think his remarks falacious. The facts about the war of 1914-18, the state of mind

63, 64, 65 -- War Writers on Democracy, LIFE Vol. 8, No. 26
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However the others left much in reputation was cleaned up by Richard Aldington: " I entirely disagree with Archibald MacLeish and think his remarks ridiculous. The facts about the war of 1914-18, the state of mind

of ex-soldiers, post-war cynicism were not invented by Hemingway, Dos Passos and the other writers mentioned. They simply recorded what they saw and experienced. Precisely the same disillusion and hatred of war would have existed if none of them had ever published a word.

It is a typical highbrow delusion to suppose that authors influence anyone but the intellectuals and that intellectuals count for anything in the formation of national policy and the state of the mass mind. Most people in America have never heard of the writers MacLeish mentions and could not have been influenced by them.

If the masses are unwilling to fight for democracy, it is not because of what novelists have written but because the masses have lost faith in democracy as practiced. It is up to democracy to ^{show} it is worth fighting for. Writers are not responsible for the corrupt and imbecile leadership which led to the present mess.

MacLeish has investigated a mare's nest and discovered a red herring.⁶⁶

It is rather unfortunate that the weight of the evidence indicates that Aldington is right, and MacLeish wrong, for the amount of space devoted to the argument by newspapers and magazines, and the lively controversy it stirred up show that the public has not lost its faith in the efficacy of the purpose novel. Uncle Tom's Cabin helped prod the nation into the Civil War, and MacLeish hoped to prove that the anti-war writers prodded the nation away from war. He was working from a faulty basis, for the conditions were not the same. Mrs. Stowe and her fellows were attacking a problem that was concrete and vital, and capable of solution. The post-war writers were, as were the temperance writers, attacking a problem that was incapable of solution through novels and legislation inspired by these novels. A mass shift in human nature cannot be brought about by novels. These writers tried to ostracize war by emotionalizing the rational reasons for this banishment, but since an appeal to these same emotions can reconvert the readers to the cause of war, novels written with the partial purpose of ousting war are doomed to failure, as were the temperance novels.

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PART VIII

The Proletarian Novel

Among the phenomena of the post-war years⁶⁷ was the proletarian novel. The depression served to intensify the movement, which finally became another casualty of the Russo-German Alliance and the Red invasion of Finland. All of these writers were either militant Communists, or fellow travellers, and made adherence to the party line the standard of their work. As a result of this, didacticism came back into the purpose novel with a vengeance. Added to the avowed purpose of presenting the Communist way of life as the only enduring one for Americans.

Never has there been a more vocal literary movement, and never has there been so much agitation over such weak material. V. F. Calverton, one of the ardent champions of the movement shows quite clearly how the school rose and fell with two quotations from his varied writings. In the middle thirties he said:

"Today, to be sure, the proletarian tendency has taken on all the aspects of a movement. In the United States, this movement has developed with greatest rapidity during the depression years. Today its members are to be found in key positions in the book and magazine field. In half the New York publishing firms today, there are one or more persons of influence who encourage the publication of books which favor the outlook and philosophy of this school. In the magazine and newspaper field, there are editors, associate editors, assistant editors, feature writers, columnists, star reporters, who are in sympathy with the proletarian outlook and encourage its appearance in their publications whenever possible. In novels such as The Shadow Before, by William Rollins, Jr., The Death and Birth of David Markand by Waldo Frank, and Robert Cantwell's Land of Plenty there are the vigor and challenge of rediscovered hope, of renewed faith in the future of man - and of America."⁶⁷

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Sociological Criticism of Literature, p 880, in The Making of Society by the same author, Modern Library, 1937

PART VIII

The Protestant Novel

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Despite the attractive possibilities he then saw, Calverton thought otherwise by 1940:

"The Proletarian Movement dominated the thirties, but during the thirties however, the proletarian movement produced little that was interesting, and less that was significant." 68

If so ardent a champion of the movement confessed to its failure, it is obvious that its high hopes were based on unstable foundations. Since these were openly intended as purpose novels, the reasons for their failure ought to throw light upon the essentials of effective purpose fiction. The troubles with the proletarian novel were too much purpose and too much didacticism.

Most of the writers of this school felt under the necessity of relating activity in their novels with the body of Marxian doctrine to which they were converted. They used Russia as an absolute, and allowed nothing American in outlook to interfere with or contradict the true Russian perspective. They used art as propaganda and literature as a weapon. Their work was naturalistic in subject-matter and method. One type presented proletarian material with little or no social doctrine, but the majority combined naturalistic subject-matter and treatment with an implicit or explicit revolutionary doctrine with a more or less experimental novelistic technique. The majority are full of radical homiletics and devoid of creative imagination. Many of them couldn't write and hadn't the shadow of an idea of what constituted literature. The majority of these writers were the disciples stylistically of Sinclair Lewis, and were reporters first and novelists afterwards. There seems to have been two pigeonholes into which proletarian fiction could be classified -- reporting, or propaganda. The reporting was

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"Land of Literary Plenty" Saturday Review of Literature, May 11, 1940
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guilty of over-simplification, the propaganda is, by nature, over-emphasised. They set up novel-machines, where each part functions for the whole, and each character is fitted into the total effect, so that they all serve only to further the didactic. The characters have to act according to dogma, not according to the working of human nature. The writers were political publicists rather creative artists. While there is emotional thinking aplenty, objective analysis is conspicuous by its absence. Very few writers can act as political commentators and novelists at the same time. Most of them blithely ignored the fact that most farmers and workers are immensely ignorant of what brought on their plight, and even more ignorant of official Communist doctrines. It is worse than the learned schoolgirl-defender of slavery in Mr Frank, the Underground Mail Agent.

Not only was the general theme of Communism hammered on at all times, but the characters (such as they were) must always act as good Communists. The same complaints that were made about Sinclair will also apply to these novels: they were propaganda first, last, and always; the plots were melodramatic and often absurd, the characters were wooden embodiments of the author's theories. They showed little or no sense of humor, abound in unresolved gloom, and wallow in misery, and bathed in tragic trivialities. The followers of the Party were all good, their opponents all bad. Here was one of the paradoxes of the school -- the capitalist oppressors are at the same time so decadent and weak that they are on the verge of destruction, but at the same time they are filled with great strength, cunning and perseverance.

It seems strange that the followers of a man that made so much of history could not examine past examples of purpose fiction and profit as much from their studies as their founder did from his. At the very time Marx

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was making the observations of the Hungry Forties that he incorporated in his books, Dickens went through the same London and drew upon these economic maladjustments for material for his books. The conclusion is inescapable -- if the writers of the proletarian novel of the Twenties and Thirties had any genuine fictional talent, it was snowed under by devotion to the Marxian dialectic. There was little or no excuse for their work being as inferior as it was.

Some of the more known of the proletarian novels and novelists include Albert Halper-Union Square(1933), The Foundry(1934); Josephine Herbst-Pity Is Not Enough(1933), The Executioner Waits(1934), Rope of Gold(1939); Jack Conroy-The Disinherited(1933) and A World To Win(1935); William Rollins -- The Shadow Before(1934) ; Robert Cantwell - The Land of Plenty (1934); Michael Gold - Jews Without Money(1928); Edward Newhouse - You Can't Sleep Here(n.d.) Others included Clara Weatherwax's Marching, Marching! Myra Page's Gathering Storm, Tom Kromer's Waiting for Nothing, and Arnold Armstrong's Parched Gold. Some of Dos Passos' novels have a proletarian bias to them, but are redeemed by his greater literary skill.

These writers took themselves very seriously, and held two Congresses to discuss their work, one in 1935, one in 1937. They issued a manifesto in their mouthpiece, The New Republic, calling for delegates to the '37 conference that contains an idea and appeal that had not been seen in American papers for quite a few years -- an appeal for direct purpose and didactic fiction.

"... Fifth, to defend the political and social institutions that make for peace and encourage a healthy culture -- and specifically to defend the democratic rights to education, to freedom of thought and expression.

Sixth, to effect an alliance for cultural defense between American writers and all progressive forces in the nation." ⁶⁹

The very writers that had screamed against the American system as the source of all evil had seen the rise of Germany, and scurried to defend the old decadant America that they had assailed for years. What was left of their old faith was blasted by the Russo-German alliance, which proved that either they were very wrong, or that the paragon of Communism had gone very sour. They preferred to believe they were right and Russia wrong.

Their ideas were unsound to start with, because of the impossibility of the task they attempted. Not realizing that proletarian fiction as they desired it was terribly difficult, they worked under the assumption that the proletarian point of view was enough to endow a writer with skill and talent, which is an assumption that cannot stand up under attack. Their attitude with the moral is like that of a swine-herd flogging a porker over a gate -- they pound on it without mercy. Once they take up the class struggle, one eye or the other goes blank. Members of the bourgeois themselves, whenever they mention their brothers a definite paranoia shows itself.

An examination of a typical proletarian novel, and a few of the better ones will suffice to show how the type works out, and the defects that it contains. The Underground Stream (1940) by Albert Maltz is a story written around the labor struggles in Detroit in 1936, and describes the struggle for union recognition before the C.I.O. had taken a hand in organizing the automobile industry. The chief characters are a Fascist personnel manager of the anti-union Jefferson plant, and a Communist organizer who chooses to die rather than betray his party. "Princey" and his wife, together with their Communist fellows, are the salt of the earth. But Princey runs afoul of a budding Fascist organization, run by soulless fiends who capture him,

the very nature of the thing, that the American people are the ones
of all will have seen the rise of Germany, and certainly a defeat was
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Michael Gold's Jews Without Money (1928) was the first major proletarian novel to receive wide attention, and while later radical writers had a rather low opinion of it, it did much to prepare the public for the more violent works that came later.

The two best proletarian novels are probably William Rollin's The Shadow Before, and Robert Cantwell's The Land of Plenty. The Shadow Before deals with the ghastly history of a New England textile town during a strike. Rollins has a range of characters, and tries to ~~veer~~ away from melodrama, and while he is militantly proletarian in outlook, he does not allow this to distort his keen sense realistic characters or his abilities to tell a good labor story within the confines of a novel. The average proletarian-novel strike is unmotivated, but this strike seems real and convincing. The Land of Plenty shows much of the same qualities, and deals with another strike, this time in a lumber mill of the Pacific Northwest. These two books are rather good fiction, but indifferent or worse when considered as purpose fiction, for it is hard to write "Party" literature, no matter what the party may be, or how talented the writer attempting the feat may be. Writing for the masses is one thing, but writing for the classes is something quite different. When compared to the outstanding purpose novels of the past, we see that the best proletarian novels are none too good.

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art regimentation. They held that the writer should concern himself with politics, and were even more specific, and said that it must be a certain kind of politics. Not only that, but every aspect of the novel must point inexorably towards the Marxian dialect. Finally it got so that it was not enough to champion Communism, it had to be the right brand, and not the Trotsky perversion. Well, even if this standard is accepted, the corollary would cause trouble. For when hostile literary critics swung the ax on some of these novels on the grounds that they were devoid of literary merits, the authors raged that their work was being sentenced on its political aspect. Like the Gorgon, all opposition was considered by the lumpenliterati as a challenging of the natural order of things. In view of the many weaknesses of the movement from its inception, it is more or less of a wonder that it lasted as long as it did., for the novel serving as propaganda at the barricades is not too likely to become a literary trail-blazer.

Yet despite all of this, the proletarian novel is not to be sneered at. For while the artificial, Moscow-inspired proletarian novel is dead, the real novel of the proletariat, when divorced from politics and party economics has great possibilities. Theodore Dreiser has written genuine proletarian novels for years, and has shown that the poor can furnish subject-matter for the novelist that is top-notch. The proletarian novel, when written by an artist who is divorced from party politics and too much half-digested economics, can be a very moving and powerful work. Richard Wright and John Steinbeck have shown the possibilities of this. To paraphrase the Bible, an author cannot serve two masters - his artistic integrity and the party - for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to one and despise the other.

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PART IX

Concerning Sinclair Lewis

Sinclair Lewis goes in a class by himself, for his novels have had purpose to them, purposes that do not fit into any of the types that have been set up here. His crude vigor and moral earnestness, his malicious reporting, and his choice of a subject and tone of anti-bourgeois animus made him an important example to the proletarian writers, who seized upon all of his defects and few if any of his merits, and made them their own.

While still at Yale, he became a disciple of Sinclair, and this admiration showed in his anti-Fascist novel It Can't Happen Here(1935). His two most famous books, Main Street(1920) and Babbitt(1922) did much to arouse the public to self-scrutiny and self-criticism. The books had a tremendous effect and their titles have become descriptive terms in our language. It is hard to tell whether Lewis had a definite purpose or didactic intent in mind when he wrote Main Street, but it is obvious that this was the case in his later books. The reasons for the success of these two books, and the adoption of their titles into the common vocabulary are found in the nature of the situations he attacked. ^{They were} ~~It was~~ one that the individual reader could do something about, once he became aware of it. The Babbitts of real life could see themselves and their neighbors in the Lewis characters, and the women could identify themselves in Carol Kennicott. Babbitt was something that cried for reform, and all that was needed was some one to crystalize the sentiments of the public to personal action. Lewis was peculiarly suited for such a task, and when his malicious mind

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created a character that embodied all that the problem stood for, the public got angry, both at Lewis for mocking them, and at themselves, for being unconscious Babbitts.

Not all of Lewis' excursions into purpose fiction were so fortunate. His Ann Vickers (1933) was a futile piece of propaganda against organized society, decency, self-control, etc. There is a long section on the ill-treatment of the convicts at Copperhead Gap, where his heroine is interested in reform, but the book is far below Whitlock's The Turn of the Balance.

Even more unfortunate was It Can't Happen Here, which is a rather bad tract against fascism in the United States. The book shows Lewis at his worst and the anti-fascist novel in a typical form. The actual doings of the Fascists have been far more successful than these diluted tirades in arousing the American public against the whole system of totalitarianism. Both the pro-Communist and the anti-Fascist novels seem to indicate that fiction is a poor medium for affecting the political sympathies of the reader, and that facts are more effective than fiction. Mein Kampf and Out of the Night have not fictional rivals that can so effectively expose the two systems they speak of.

When Lewis stuck to treatment of problems that were capable of solution by the individual in the mass, he wrote much better, and had much more effect than when he merely appealed to the mass as a whole, undivided group. This helps explain how he could be such a success in his early novels and such a dismal failure in his latter works.. The problem is as important to the purpose writer as the treatment, if not more so.

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PART X

The True Novels of the Proletariat

What the twelve years of struggle failed to do for the Communist-inspired proletarian novel has been treated in an earlier section. But the novel of the proletariat is not something to be hoped for. There have been several authors who have written books that will creditably meet the requirements. The two Steinbeck novels, In Dubious Battle (1936) and The Grapes of Wrath (1939), will qualify, for they are about the proletariat, and make pleas in its behalf. They prove that it is quite possible to make a sympathy for the common worker and a protest against economic injustices the materials of effective and successful novels.

In Dubious Battle was the result of a newspaper assignment to look into California's labor camps. It is one of the best of the recent fictional treatments of the strike theme, well worthy of comparison to The Harbor. If anything, the strike is more impressive in the Steinbeck book, for it is the main theme. Like Dos Passos and Lewis, Steinbeck sees things through a reporter's eyes, and has written from the reportorial viewpoint, modified to meet the altered requirements of the novel. The book deals with the California Fruit Country. Its theme is to tell how and why the migratory workers in the orchards finally turned to the strike. Told through the viewpoint of a young radical sympathizer, Jim Nolan, the book shows the various types of minds that cohere behind a strike. The book ends with the strike unsettled. This is not quite what the older type of proletarian novelist would have done, but it tends to strengthen the effect of the

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The True Novels of the Protestants

What the twelve years of struggle failed to do for the Communist-inspired proletarian novel has been created in an earlier section. But the novel of the protestant is not something to be hoped for. There have been several authors who have written books that will creditably meet the requirements. The two Steinbeck novels, In Dubious Battle (1935) and The Grapes of Wrath (1939), will qualify, for they are about the protestant, and make plans in its behalf. They prove that it is quite possible to make a way for the common worker and a protest against economic injustices the materials of effective and successful novels.

In Dubious Battle was the result of a newspaper assignment to look into California's labor camps. It is one of the best of the recent fictional treatments of the strike theme, well worthy of comparison to The Harbor. If anything, the strike is more impressive in the Steinbeck book, for it is the main theme. Like Dos Passos and Lewis, Steinbeck sees things through a reporter's eyes, and has written from the reportorial viewpoint, modified to meet the altered requirements of the novel. The book deals with the California Fruit Country. Its theme is to tell how and why the mistreated workers in the orchards finally turned to the strike. Told through the viewpoint of a young radical sympathizer, Jim Nolan, the book shows the various types of minds that cohere behind a strike. The book ends with the strike unsettled. This is not quite what the other type of proletarian novelist would have done, but it tends to strengthen the effect of the

book. It is also unorthodox in that it does not advocate any specific political party's doctrines as the panacea. Official Communism and its rigid dogmas are conspicuous by their absence. Not only is there a lack of party propaganda in the positive sense; it is lacking in the negative sense also. Steinbeck uses the reportorial technique quite extensively, but he does not abuse this method. He does not propagandize, and thus avoids the pitfalls of over-simplification and over-emotionalizing which have entrapped so many writers of the proletarian purpose novel. His strike is not one of those things that you can track back to one instance and say, "If this only had been avoided, there would have been no trouble." The strike seems to the reader to be one that was caused by real conditions and mental states, and not the result of antagonistic political and philosophical doctrines that are precisely differentiated.

The Grapes of Wrath, the most widely known and influential purpose novel of recent times, is an excellent illustration of effective purpose fiction. It deals with the proletariat, but, as was the case with In Dubious Battle, it is the proletariat divorced from political dogma and class strife in the narrow sense of the Communist school. Steinbeck was born in the country that he describes, and spent most of his life there. He worked there, and made a careful study of his material before starting the actual writing. He claims that all of his characters were based on people that he has known. When he made up his mind to write the book, he got a car, went to Oklahoma, and drove back to California over the route that he took the Joad family. In his choice of characters, Steinbeck created people who, while individualized, stand for all humble humanity. While he does not directly state this, the implication is inescapable. Steinbeck does not assail the whole capitalist system; he condemns abuses

book. It is also worthless in that it does not advocate any specific political party's doctrine as the panacea. Official Communism and its rigid dogmas are condemned by their absence. Not only is there a lack of party propaganda in the positive sense; it is lacking in the negative sense also. Steinbeck uses the reportorial technique quite extensively, but he does not abuse this method. He does not propagandize, and thus avoids the pitfalls of over-simplification and over-emotionalizing which have entrapped so many writers of the proletarian purpose novel. His style is not one of those things that you can track back to one instance and say, "It's this only had been avoided, there would have been no trouble." The style seems to the reader to be one that was caused by real conditions and mental states, and not the result of antagonistic political and philosophical doctrines that are precisely differentiated.

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within that system occasioned by personal greed and fear. His Joad family is not an angelic unit pitted against black-hearted villains, but a typical family of share-croppers, no better, and probably a little worse than the average. The very frailties of the family serve to heighten their effectiveness as symbols while insuring their strength as individuals. Steinbeck does not force his sermonizing down his reader's throat; he allows him to draw his own conclusions from the material presented. While grim themes -- hunger, violence, murder -- run through the novel, it ends on an optimistic note. Ma Joad simply wanted a chance to settle down on a ~~farm~~ where the family could keep together and work the soil; she did not demand a whole new order, she simply wanted a chance for her family to enjoy those rights granted all Americans in their Constitution. Steinbeck makes this claim seem entirely reasonable and creates sympathy for his characters.

Although the Joads endure all manner of misfortunes, the novel flows along smoothly, entirely lacking in the chamber of horrors alternated with preaching technique of earlier purpose fiction. The message is there, but it is implied, not stated directly. Steinbeck knows enough to keep himself out of his book, and puts his ideas into the mouths of his characters in such a way that they seem to be their own. There is no character that acts as expositor for the author, and no undigested lumps of didacticism. The ability of the author to employ the interplay between individual and mass-feeling does much to further the impact of the book.

Non-political, non-dogmatic, the book drives home the terrible facts of a wholesale injustice committed by society, emotionalizing the theme so that the public will be aroused and made angry, and demand some sort of alleviation for the victims of the injustice. Taking both the literary and didactic elements into consideration along with the impact of the book upon

within that system occasioned by personal greed and lust. The Lord family is

not an angelic unit pitted against black-bearded villains, but a typical

family of share-croppers, no better, and probably a little worse than the

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alleviation for the victims of the injustice. Taking both the literary and

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the public, The Grapes of Wrath is the finest example of purpose fiction since Ramona, a book about the same locality. Both Mrs. Jackson and Steinbeck assume that their readers can think for themselves, and make no attempt to beat their ideas into their readers' skulls, and clothe their messages in first-rate stories acted out by convincing characters. When Sinclair is compared with either of these two, he is worsted on every count, for a success through material can never hope to compete with a success that combines both material and expert fictional treatment. Indeed, the very vehemence of the propagandizing of writers such as Sinclair and the proletarians causes the reader to doubt their sincerity. Steinbeck is not guilty of the over-simplification and over-use of half-truths that many writers of this type of purpose fiction are too prone to employ. By conveying the vastness and complexity of the economic disorder that sent the Joads wandering homeless over half a continent, Steinbeck greatly strengthens his case. If he had traced all of the grief and misery back to one man, or one group of men, as so many writers of purpose fiction would have been likely to do, the readers, other than radicals, would have taken it about as seriously as the machinations of the villain of old-time melodrama. His ability to convey the feeling that "There but for the Grace of God go I", gives the book a solidarity of impression that is lacking in ninety-nine purpose novels out of a hundred.

The average purpose novel is built on the scheme of:

"A little neglect may breed mischief; for want of a nail the shoe was lost; for want of a shoe the horse was lost; and for want of a horse the rider was lost."⁷⁰

Everything is made to hang on one instance that is easily preventable; the seemingly wanton operations of nemesis of an Aeschylean tragedy is modern-

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Maxims prefixed to Poor Richard's Almanac, 1757 - by Benjamin Franklin

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When we compare Steinbeck's treatment of the proletariat with that of the authors of the orthodox proletarian fiction, or with the aimless immensities of Theodore Dreiser on the inarticulate and inchoate desires of that same proletariat, we can see how much of an improvement his work shows. He has the saving sense of humor and proportion, senses which must play a subordinate role, it is true, but an extremely important role; if they were lacking, his work would be but pedestrian. He has taken the reportorial technique of a Sinclair or a Lewis and subjected it to his own sympathies for his subject. The Grapes of Wrath is not only a sign of the development of the art of the writers of purpose fiction, it is a tribute to the growing ability of the public to detect crude preaching and obvious propaganda for what it is. A contrast of The Power of Sympathy and the Steinbeck book shows what a long way both the American author and his public have travelled.

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PART XI

The Current Status of Didacticism as it Affects the Novel

While the first American novels were avowedly didactic, and continued so for at least a quarter-century, the novel was able to exist for itself from then on. But the didactic novel did not become extinct, it merely lost its dominant position. Children's books and women's books are still largely under its sway. Didacticism has been largely overthrown by adult fiction, but since a large part of the literate portion of the country still favor didacticism in their reading matter, their wants are supplied. Even today the majority of women demand didactic literature, and books and magazines designed for women are invariably didactic. The tabus imposed by this didacticism of a large portion of the reading public have a definite effect upon American fiction. Since a good portion of the fiction written for this class appears first in popular magazines, a definite limitation is placed upon the author. The majority of this fiction is innocuous to start with, and with these limitations, it is kept that way. The machined quality of much of this fiction tends to make it artificial, and a strict adherence to the didactic standards of the publication completes the removal of any spontaneity the story might have possessed. Most people blame the short-story-form for the monotony of these tales, but this is only a partial placing of the blame, for the insistence of the readers and publishers upon conformity to the didactic standards plays the role that should be attacked. The ephemerality of this writing is well merited, but it has the bad effect of making the people whose literary fare consists solely of this bowdler-

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ized fiction antipathetic to any other form. H. L. Menken gives the case

rather neatly in his preface The Puritan and American Literature:

"The literature of the nation, even the literature of the enlightened minority, has been under harsh Puritan restraints from the beginning, and despite a few stealthy efforts at revolt -- usually quite without artistic value or even common honesty, as in the case of the cheap fiction magazines and that of smutty plays on Broadway, and always very short-lived -- it shows not the slightest sign of emancipating itself today. The American, try as he will, can never imagine any work of the imagination as wholly devoid of moral content. It must either tend toward the promotion of virtue, or be suspect and abominable.

If any doubt of this is in your mind, turn to the critical articles in the newspapers and literary weeklies; you will encounter enough proofs in a month's explorations to convince you forever. A novel or a play is judged among us, not by its dignity of conception, its artistic honesty, its perfection of workmanship, but almost entirely by its orthodoxy of doctrine, its platitudinousness, its usefulness as a moral tract." 71

This is almost the same complaint that Sidney made over three centuries earlier. The unofficial censorship in behalf of didacticism is quite strong, but the public hears but little of it. But if one were to follow Mr. Menken's suggestion, and run through a month's crop of book reviews from all sources, he would see that this control is well kept up, and protected by the public delusion that it is dead. The average reader says, "I don't need any didacticism in my reading, but it might be a good thing for women and children!" An examination of the novels published in any given year will reveal that three books out of four are colored by this didacticism of the public; the ratio may be even higher. This cultural lag seems to be a permanent condition, and while the tabus of today show a vast change over those of a century ago, the change is but comparative. The condition is a result of the intellectual inequality of the nation, and helps to propagate it. The provincial fear of the loose habits of Europe has become a fear of the loose

71 The Puritan and American Literature, as given in Modern Library # 81
A Modern Book of Criticism, p. 172

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habits of the big cities. The majority of Americans still have a vast apathy for non-utilitarian literature, but this is not an exclusively American trait. Such non-utilitarian literature as they do read must conform to their standards and outlooks, and as a result didactic mediocrity is still more popular than undidactic genius. But there is one slight improvement - writers have given up trying to reform women ^{and} children through the novel, and keeping non-reforming novels from them. They simply write their novels within a certain range that will serve both purposes. The spread of literacy has not made for a great improvement in literary standards; indeed, it has made mandatory two kinds of literature -- literature proper, and reading matter for the barely literate. Run through the short stories and "book-length novels" found in most magazines, and you will find that vice is punished and virtue rewarded with the deadly monotony and infallibility of old-time melodrama. Any deviation from the reader's norm is dealt with in proportion to the seriousness of that deviation, and you are left with no room for doubt that their fate was not richly deserved. The easiest method of differentiating between these two types is to check for the emphasis placed on didacticism, with its concomitant system of rewards and punishments. ⁷²

While didacticism no longer hag-rides all American literature, it is by no means extinct. People still fear the siren sweetness of "The serpents taylor of sinfull fancie."

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If a person were so minded, he could work out an excellent case against Samuel Richardson, charging him with being responsible for penning books that have had an extremely pernicious influence upon American fiction, for people that never heard of Richardson or his books subscribe whole-heartedly to the morality he sponsored, and resent any fiction that does not present this morality in a favorable light.

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this morality in a favorable light.

PART XII

The Art of Purpose Fiction

There have been few articles written on purpose fiction, and the majority of these articles have been written by critics, not authors. But the best essay on the subject was written by an author of purpose fiction -- Frank Norris. His The Novel with a Purpose is an excellent, but by no means complete treatment of the subject. While Norris did not exactly follow his own rules, they are of sufficient interest to warrant a copious quotation.

"Every novel must do one of three things -- it must (1) tell something, (2) show something, or (3) prove something. Some novels do all three of these; some do only two; all must do at least one.

The ordinary novel merely tells something, elaborates a complication, devotes itself primarily to things. In this class comes the novel of adventure, such as The Three Musketeers.

The second and better class of novel shows something, exposes the workings of a temperament, devotes itself primarily to the minds of human beings. In this class falls the novel of character, such as Romola.

The third, and what we hold to be the best class, proves something, draws conclusions from a whole congeries of forces, social tendencies, race impulses, devotes itself not to a study of men but of man. In this class falls the novel with a purpose, such as Les Misérables.

And the reason we decide upon this last as the highest form of the novel is because that, though setting a great purpose before it as its task, it nevertheless includes, and is forced to include, both of the other classes. It must tell something, must narrate vigorous incidents and must show something, must penetrate deep into the motives and character of type-men, men who are composite pictures of a multitude of men. It must do this because of the nature of its subject, for it deals with elemental forces, motives that stir whole nations. These cannot be handled as abstractions in fiction. Fiction can find expression only in the concrete. The elemental forces, then, contribute to the novel with a purpose to provide it with vigorous action. In the novel, force can be expressed in no other way. The social tendencies must be expressed by means of analysis of the characters of the men and women who compose that society, and the two must be combined and manipulated to evolve the purpose -- to find the value of X.

The production of such a novel is probably the most arduous task in fiction. Nowhere else is success more difficult; nowhere else is

The Art of Purposive Fiction

There have been few writers who have written in purpose fiction. The majority of these writers have been writers of fiction, not writers of purpose fiction. The best writer on the subject is William S. Pater, in his essay -- "The Novel with a Purpose." It is an excellent, and by no means complete, treatment of the subject. While there is a bit of a bias in his treatment, it is one of the most interesting and relevant treatments of the subject. He divides the novel into two classes: (1) the novel of "purpose" and (2) the novel of "art." The novel of "purpose" is a novel which is written with a definite purpose in view. It is a novel which is written to teach a lesson, to convey a message, or to do some other specific thing. The novel of "art" is a novel which is written for the sake of art. It is a novel which is written to please, to amuse, or to do some other thing which is not specifically defined. Pater argues that the novel of "purpose" is a more serious and more valuable form of fiction than the novel of "art." He claims that the novel of "purpose" is more likely to be read and more likely to have a lasting impact on the reader. He also claims that the novel of "purpose" is more likely to be written by a more serious and more talented writer. However, he also acknowledges that the novel of "art" has its own merits and its own value. He claims that the novel of "art" is more likely to be read for pleasure and more likely to be remembered for its artistic qualities. In the end, Pater concludes that the novel of "purpose" is a more serious and more valuable form of fiction than the novel of "art." He claims that the novel of "purpose" is more likely to be read and more likely to have a lasting impact on the reader. He also claims that the novel of "purpose" is more likely to be written by a more serious and more talented writer. However, he also acknowledges that the novel of "art" has its own merits and its own value. He claims that the novel of "art" is more likely to be read for pleasure and more likely to be remembered for its artistic qualities.

failure so easy. Unskillfully treated, the story may dwindle down and degenerate into mere special pleading, and the novelist become a polemicist, a pamphleteer, forgetting that, although his first consideration is to prove his case, his means must be living human beings, not statistics, and that his tools are not figures, but pictures from life as he sees it. The novel with a purpose is, one contends, a preaching novel. But it preaches by telling things and showing things. Only, the author selects from the great storehouse of actual life the things to be told and the things to be shown, which shall bear upon his problem, his purpose. The preaching, the moralizing, is the result of direct appeal by the writer, but is made -- should be made -- to the reader by the very incidents of the story.⁷³

Further on in the same essay, Norris gives his opinion as to the proportion that the purpose should play in the novel as a whole:

"For the novelist, the purpose of his novel, the problem he is to solve, is to his story what the keynote is to the sonata. It is important as an end and also as an ever-present guide. For the writer it is as important only as a note to which his work must be attuned. The moment, however, that the writer becomes really and vitally interested in his purpose, his novel fails."⁷⁴

Any detailed consideration of American purpose and didactic fiction will indicate the truth of what Norris said. The fact that some of our most successful purpose novels have not come up to these standards in no way makes them less valid. Those exceptions won success either on the strength of their material, or a lack of sophistication on the part of the readers. These essays were published in 1903, long before the advent of the "Proletarian" novel, and since this type conforms with none of these standards, it is little wonder they were so wretched. The public's ^{ability} ~~opinion~~ to detect propaganda has made a refinement in the technique of the purpose novel inevitable. A public bombarded by the thousands of advertisements in the press and radio is a far harder customer to satisfy than the readers of Mrs. Stowe's day. Indeed, a tough classification of good and bad writers of purpose fiction can be made by determining how well they have learned of this increased public resistance to propaganda, and profited by it. The "fellow-travellers" apparently worked under the delusion that their

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The Responsibilities of the Novelist and other literary essays
Frank Norris, (1903, N.Y.) pp 25-26

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Ibid, p. 28

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readers could not see their work for what it was. It is true that the reading public of earlier days had far less aversion to preaching; indeed, a good portion of them demanded it. But the modern reader resents obvious preaching and in order to satisfy him, the writer of purpose fiction must hide his preachings with every gloss that he knows.

Basing the work on past performance, let us draw up a set of requirements for an ideal piece of purpose fiction. As is the case with all theories, these rules can be violated successfully, but these violations are few and far between.

The book should have its "style engaging, its logic weighty, and its deductions weighty", but it should not be keyed for "people of the dullest minds and the wildest sympathies". The book should help frame the thought of those who cannot think for themselves, or who are not in a position to appreciate the nature of the problem the author wishes to champion, by the method Pope states:

"Men must be taught as if you taught them not,
And things unknown propos'd as things forgot." 75

The author must know his material thoroughly, in all its aspects and implications, but he must use selection and proportion in employing this material. He must use imagination to bring his facts into focus, because mere facts just catalogued can, in the mass, be untrue, unless imagination is used to point them up. He must be wareful of over-sentimentalizing, and indiscriminate use of the half-truth. The purpose novel, in the hands of a craftsman, is a powerful weapon. The author can beg the question, he can bend facts to fit his argument, and, if he has the power, he can take a rather weak argument and through specious and facile reasoning, make it

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almost irresistible. But he must use discretion in all this, considering each part both as itself, and as a part of the whole book. A sense of proportion and a sense of humor are prerequisites for writers of purpose fiction. The choice of a problem is important. It must be one that is current, or one that will appeal to many. It should be something that is capable of potential solution, and not a personal problem, such as greed, or intemperance, etc.

Having decided on the problem, and rounded up the necessary facts and ^s research-material, the author should begin to write his novel, attacking the problem as a novelist, not as a preacher, or a lecturer. Righteous indignation and marshalled facts alone do not make a good purpose novel. The characters should dominate the story, or should at least seem to dominate it. There should be every effort made to keep from inserting a character that is a mere mouthpiece for the author's opinions, and the author should avoid editorializing between exhibits of his theories. Such philosophies as he wishes to express should seem to come as the thoughts and ideas of his characters. The author should never leave any undigested lumps of preaching in his work. Once he proves his point, he should either go on to a new idea, or stop. Use of the same idea time after time with but the slightest variations is a besetting sin of many purpose novels.

The book should not be obviously melodramatic. The melodramatic incidents must fit in smoothly with the rest of the book. The writer should not have his books all blacks and whites, or in the case of the proletarian novel, all blacks, whites, and reds. The rule of proportion is all-important here. Plausibility must dominate both characters and incidents, so that the book can be read purely as a novel and still have enough appeal to mark it out from ordinary books.

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Yet the author should not make the mistake of becoming too impartial in his outlook, and too suave in his treatment, for while these may make his book an excellent novel, they may harm the effectiveness of its purpose. Indeed, the equation of the purpose to the story and characters is a ticklish one, with infinite chances for slipping too much to one side or the other. While a certain amount of indignation and protest is imperative, too much is decidedly harmful. The purpose must be always kept in mind, but it must be implied, not directly stated. There is the constant danger that the book will either become so mild that it is innocuous, or that it will degenerate into soap-box oratory, or be used as an ass's jawbone to thwack the reader.

Walt Whitman pointed out the ideal method of presentation for purpose fiction in his introduction to Franklin Evans;

"I would remind those who believe in the wholesome doctrines of abstinence, how the earlier teachers of piety used parables as the fit instruments whereby they might convey to men the beauty of the system they professed."⁷⁶

Discarding the antiquated language, we see that Whitman had the right idea, even if he didn't heed his own advice. The parable, padded and expanded to novel-length, is the ideal form for the purpose novel. The parable enables the author to reach those who "seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand!"⁷⁷ By this method the author can take a fairly abstract and complicated set of ideas and embody them into a medium that is graphic and seemingly not sermonic, and yet insure that the reader gets the point. The effective parable involves its characters in situations that could happen to anybody, a point that too many writers of purpose fiction seem to have ignored. The problem resolves itself into expanding

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Franklin Evans introduction, p. 5

⁷⁷ Matthew, XIII, 13

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the parable into novel-length, and yet retain its effectiveness, buttressing it by the opportunity for more plot and character development. In doing this, the writer must sheer away from melodrama and preaching other than what is needed to drive home the point of the parable.

The episodic form is bad in purpose fiction; the plot must cohere and not be a series of events tumbling after each other head over heels. Besides wrecking the plot-structure, the episodic method often leads to melodramatic situations.

Authors that seek to teach must successfully graft their teaching on the literature of power, and teach through moving, a graft that is but infrequently successful. With all of the difficulties that must be overcome, and the mastery of technique that is needed, that as far as purpose fiction is concerned,

"Whoever thinks a faultless piece to see,
Thinks what ne'er was, nor is, nor e'er shall be." 78

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Pope, An Essay on Criticism, Part II, lines 253-4

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By an oversight, one of the most important elements has been omitted -- the absolute necessity for a sense of humor, or that aspect of a sense of humor that is an awareness of the ridiculous. While this might be considered as a part of what has been called "proportion and selection", it ought to be emphasized that an absence of a sense of the ridiculous is a fatal weakness. Nowhere did this become more evident than in the novels of the Paper Civil War and the Temperance novels. The one thing that will kill any purpose fiction is ridiculous incidents. An absence of this sense is detrimental to any creative writing, but no where is it more to be avoided than in purpose or didactic fiction.

PART XIII

Summary of the development of American Didactic and Purpose Fiction
1789 - - - -1941

The Europeans who came to this country brought over their literary prejudices along with their other possessions. The failure of the aristocratic faction to regain their power here after the Glorious Revolution insured the dominance of the bourgeois mind, with its inherent fondness for the didactic. The absence of a reading public of cultured men and women, and a deep-seated aversion to non-utilitarian reading matter retarded the reaction to didacticism for many years. Not until Cooper did America produce a novelist with enough power to free his work of these shackles.

What few novels that were written were frankly and unashamedly didactic. Richardson's success at using the novel as a decoy for his sententious moralizing urged many Americans to use the novel for the same purpose. These writers used all of the Englishman's vices and none of his redeeming virtues. The general public looked on the novel as something fit only for women and children, and thinking from this assumption, they hedged the novel about with rules to protect them from themselves, as the Aristotlean idea that only men enjoyed a fully developed rational faculty was then unchallenged. The men held that any reasoning creature would ignore fiction, but since those who did read them could not think for themselves, the novel should be made to think correctly for them. It was not too difficult a matter to saddle didacticism upon the back of the American novel, but didacticism unfortunately proved an Old Man of the Sea, and getting it off again was to prove a difficult job.

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Summary of the development of American Didactic and Purposive Fiction
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Women were given didactic fare in their novels, and kept on this diet so long that they came to expect it in all their fiction, a craving that they still possess. And since women have the necessary leisure, they form the backbone of the reading public, and their wants must be vared for. Of late they have turned on their intellectual fellows, the children, and insisted that their old fiction be scrapped in favor of more didactic fare.

The first American novels were a combination of didacticism and purpose, and as didacticism waned in influence, its loss was more than compensated for by the rise of the purpose novel. While the didactic element has degenerated until it is found chiefly in third- and fourth-rate fiction, purpose fiction has been able to more than hold its own against all comers.

There has been a distinct change in the nature of the purpose in the American novel. The early novels largely dealt with personal problems, or problems unconnected with economics -- female education, the perils of seduction, the dangers of novel-reading, anti-Wertherism, and the European "isms" of that day. But as soon as the novel became more widely accepted, and its writers became more aware of some of the techniques of their art, we find that the purpose novel began to attack problems that affected the whole body of society, instead of a rather restricted group -- "drunkards, wife-beaters, and virgins". The awakening of the social conscience of the American people is reflected in the novels that they wrote and read. Negro slavery, the abuses of the industrial system, the corruption and inefficiency of politics, and the evils of monopoly replaced the earlier themes.

Indeed, the shift in subject-matter of the purpose-novel during a century and a half shows a constant widening of the application of the purpose. The early purpose novels dealt with the problems of a very restricted and selfish group. The problems were not those that afflict mankind

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in general, but those that threatened their social code. Such abuses as did not affect that code were ignored, or encouraged for the sake of the profit involved. There was no attempt to show that the individual shared a partial responsibility for the misfortunes of each and any of his fellows. This may have been a result of the Puritan idea that lack of economic success was a sign of moral depravity. This attitude persisted until the Civil War. One of the few benefits of that tragedy was that it demonstrated beyond challenge that this theory was absurd, for most of the Americans whose fortunes resulted from the war most certainly were not lacking in moral depravity, nor could their monetary blessings be judged the result of the leading of a virtuous life. It took the impact of a Civil War to show that the status quo could be challenged or questioned, an element that had been lacking in earlier purpose fiction. After half the nation had nearly been succeeded in forcefully challenging a writing as sacred as the Constitution, novelists were allowed to question lesser sacred cows. The distinction between a man and his money marks the difference between the old and the new purpose fiction. In the new, in every case, it was stressed that the man is more important than his money, or the lack of it, and that any person or group that placed money before the welfare of man was wrong, and should be stopped. This idea stemmed from the ideas of the Unitarians and the Transcendentalists, and the first book of this type, The Rev. Sylvester Judd's Margaret (1845) is called by some the first purpose fiction-work. This is not so, but Margaret showed which way the winds of purpose fiction were to blow, once the general public was ready for such anti-Puritanical ideas. The writers of the newer purpose fiction stressed that economic slavery was as bad, if not worse, as actual bondage, for it lacked the personal attention of the older slavery.

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To put this idea in another way, in the earlier novels, sentimentalism was wasted on trivialities, often "tragic trivialities", but more often than not a tempest of tears in a tea-cup, or if not that, on things and persons far removed from the authors. What happened to a man and his family was his own concern, and it was not the business of outsiders to interfere. After the War, and the decade that followed it, this idea began to change, and the sentiment that had spent itself on fine feelings, and rhapsodes on NATURE was diverted towards fellow Americans who were being exploited through no fault of their own. It was driven home to the people that the old American outlook on economics was not divinely inspired; some even began to suspect that it might not be the ideal way. As the purpose novel dealt with things nearer and nearer to home, it gained in power and effectiveness.

Since the people lead the novel, and not the other way around, it becomes obvious that the purpose novel forms a perfect mirror of the development of the social conscience of the American public. Thus it becomes possible to attempt a forecast of the probable nature of future American purpose fiction. As we have seen from past performances, the purposes treated have become more and more general --i.e., they treat problems that affect greater and greater numbers of people, and yet the purposes have become more and more specific --i.e., they treat subjects that hit nearer and nearer home to the average reader. The present novelistic pamphleteerings in behalf of "the American way of life", "democracy", "the horrors of totalitarianism" etc, are foredoomed to failure ^{for they} represent a backsliding, and since they are written by persons who have experienced the things whereof they write only vicariously, and ^{who} present their material with a disregard for any of the principles of purpose and didactic fiction, it is little wonder that their novels are so bad. There has never been a success-

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ful purpose novel written by an author who wrote just because his subject happened to be in favor, and he thought to cash in writing about something that he didn't know much about. In the case of these present effusions, the writers have a very difficult task -- making very vague and flexible terms seem graphic and concrete, hitting home to all who read their books. Their books are angry books, but not great angry books, and it is the great angry books that are the great works of purpose fiction.

Therefore, in the future, the purpose novels will probe into our social structure to expose any festering elements. These investigations will probably tend to treat more and more basic problems. With the increasing similarity of plot and treatment, it is highly probable that more writers of talent will shift to this branch of writing in order to work in a medium that will enable them to do more with their ability. For a while it was thought that the increasing employment of photography would make this type of writing much weaker, but experience has shown that even the best photographic work is not completely effectual unless it is buttressed with solid and imaginative prose commentary. Photography does make it mandatory for the writer of purpose fiction to be quite accurate in his presentation of scene, for the readers, having seen pictures of the scenes in other sources, will be able to compare the results.

One thing is certain -- until the Millennium is attained, there will be no dearth of purpose fiction. This purpose fiction, in order to be effective, must employ every trick of the regular novelists, plus an improvement on the purpose-fiction technique of the past. For purpose fiction can show what ordinary fiction cannot -- a steady improvement in technique and effect. But this improvement has insured that future effective purpose

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novels will be far superior to future run-of-the-mill novels, because if they are not, they will fail.

ABSTRACT

The elements of didacticism and purpose have bulked large throughout the development of the American novel. They were elements inherited from Europe, and the early novels were written just to serve as vehicles for them, for without them the early attempts at novel-writing would never have been tolerated. Any element of delight in the early novel was quite secondary to these two strains. The first American novel was written avowedly to "Expose the fatal Consequences of SEDUCTION and to inspire the Female Mind with a principle of Self-Contemplancy," and the last purpose novel has yet to be written.

This fondness for preaching in our fiction, while no longer the dominating element that it once was, has not yet vanished. These early novels were sub-literary, current didactic fiction is mostly sub-literary. But luckily the main stream of fiction has improved. While generally didactic fiction has stayed sub-literary, straight purpose fiction has improved with the main stream of fiction.

"Didactic" is taken to mean fiction intended to teach, "purpose" is taken to mean fiction intended to preach, preach in behalf of some specific cause. At times these terms are identical, at times they overlap, and at times they are quite separate. Didacticism was a shackles that fiction broke free of, in the main, quite early in our literary development, but purpose fiction has not only retained its position, it has become more important, both as literature and as documentation of America's social progress.

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The reasons for the rise of purpose fiction, and the decline of the didactic are obvious. The public simply refused to buy the didactic fiction as soon as there was anything better to read. Purpose fiction, which deals with problems of the day, quite naturally tends to remain in favor. Since purpose novels represent the ideas and attitudes of the public at the time of writing, they give a truer picture of their period than any strictly factual works. You can learn much of any given period by reading its purpose novels and discovering the causes championed there. They have an advantage over historical fiction in that there is not as much distortion and coloring according to future happenings and attitudes.

There is a peculiar paradox about this type of fiction -- if the author becomes too interested in his problem, his novel will suffer for it. If he preaches too much, the impact of the novel suffers, but on the other hand, if he is too mild in expounding his message, the result will be just as unfortunate. Skill is needed in the production of effective purpose fiction, far more skill than is required for straight fiction. In no other branch of fiction has the taste of the reader so improved. The techniques that made Uncle Tom's Cabin and The Jungle such successes in their day are not enough today. A comparison of Mrs. Stowe's book with Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath will show how far the writers of purpose fiction have come in less than a century. The rapid increase in the public's ability to spot propaganda for what it is hasn't made their task any easier. It takes a very skillful writer to arouse public opinion through a novel now. The shift in public taste that killed off melodrama deprived the writer of purpose fiction of one of his favorite tools, and caused him to have to work as never before. The writer who can hold the attention of the reader for a whole book, and not slight his purpose, has to be extremely talented,

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and it is for this reason that purpose fiction has been called the most difficult of all branches of writing.

The shift in technique can be shown even more effectively: three of the outstanding purpose novels have been adapted for the theatre -- Ten Nights in a Bar-room, Uncle Tom's Cabin, and The Grapes of Wrath. Each adaptation gave the main points of the book, and clearly expressed the author's purpose, or message. The fact that the Steinbeck book was made into a moving picture does not weaken the argument, for it included no essential scene that could not have been presented on the stage. Arthur's work is just plain bad, Mrs. Stowe's makes good melodrama, but blurs its message, while the Steinbeck message is delivered with added force.

These three books also indicate the changing nature of the messages preached. The first deals with a personal problem, the second with a sectional problem, and the third with a national problem. They also indicate the increasing need for novelistic skill in addition to the preaching. T.S. Arthur was a crusader with little or no genuine literary talent. His writings on other subjects than temperance are valueless. Mrs. Stowe, while every bit as much of a crusader, had genuine talent, and displayed it in her work. In Steinbeck we have a man who is primarily a writer and reporter, a man who writes from these viewpoints, and not the viewpoint of a crusader. Unlike the others, he did not take a theme that had been in the eye of the public for years, but struck out for himself on a new theme.

What then are the essential requirements for the author of good purpose fiction? They are a familiarity with the material and the problem, a sense of selection and proportion, a sense of the ridiculous, in order to avoid it. Imagination must be used to bring the facts into focus, and mere

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There is another factor in the study of American purpose fiction that is often overlooked. If these novels are at all successful, they are published abroad, and in many foreign countries these novels form the only American fiction that a great many of the people ever read or hear of. So while many would sneer at this type of fiction, it should be held in slightly higher esteem, not only for its domestic, But for its foreign influence. A nation is judged more by its purpose fiction than by any other form, at least in the mind of the general public.

Within a century the attitude of writers towards purpose fiction was almost reversed. Once looked on as a form that could be successfully employed by any person who had the necessary information and zeal, writers gradually came to realize that the problem was far more complicated, until Frank Norris proclaimed the effective purpose novel to be the highest and most difficult form of the novel, and backed up his claim by a penetrating essay that is required reading for any one interested in purpose fiction.

Any investigation of purpose fiction will reveal vast quantities of authors and titles, but many, if fact most, of these will have to be more or less slighted for the sake of space and interest, for the majority are, due to the difficulties in the way of success, quite bad. However, time spent in an investigation of purpose fiction is of interest both in itself and as an index to changing American tastes and attitudes since the founding of the Republic.

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